



COPTIC ORTHODOX CHURCH
Diocese of Sydney and affiliated Regions
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Sydney- Australia

RITUAL THEOLOGY I
According to the rites of
The Coptic Orthodox
Church

By
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Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, King of Kings and
Lord of lords



**THE BEHOLDER OF GOD
MARK THE EVANGELIST
SAINT AND MARTYR**



*H.H. Pope Shenouda III, 117th Pope of
Alexandria and the See of St. Mark*



**His Grace Bishop Daniel
Bishop of Sydney and Affiliated Regions**

RITUAL THEOLOGY I

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RITUAL THEOLOGY I

INTRODUCTION

We will introduce our course on Ritual Theology by reference to two verses of our Lord, recorded in the Gospel of St. John:

“God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth”
(John 4:24)

“It is the Spirit Who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life.” (John 6:63)

These verses encourage us to study the rituals of the Holy Church, not as a dry academic exercise, but in spirit and as life – indeed, as a life to live.

Before beginning it is necessary to make one point very clear. As I discuss the rituals of the Holy Church, whether the rituals of the Holy Mass as one of the Sacraments, or the rituals of the church herself which were delivered to us by the fathers the apostles from generation to generation; You will detect significant differences in what I shall teach about the rituals of the Holy Coptic Orthodox Church and those of other Christian denominations, such as the Roman Catholic or Anglican Churches. What I shall do is to inform you of the rituals as they have been defined and practised by tradition within the Church herself; a tradition which has been passed down from the Holy Apostles, who received it at the hands of our Lord Himself. This tradition has been thoroughly passed down from one generation to another – thus the rituals of the Church have a direct relationship to the Holy Bible and to the Apostolic Fathers from the first centuries of Christianity. We know from the four gospels that the Lord spent about three and half years teaching His twelve disciples and apostles everything; and also from the Book of Acts that the Lord after His holy resurrection spent forty days appearing to His holy apostles informing them about all what concerns the church edification (Acts 1: 3).

It is important initially to discuss the term Ritual Theology itself in a little more detail. It is significant that in Arabic the term for ‘theology’ (‘el-lahout’) incorporates both the terms ‘divinity’ and ‘theology’. Thus when we discuss Ritual Theology we should be careful to include both these senses in our understanding of the term. It follows that, with a prior knowledge of the Arabic, we can extend the traditional meaning of ‘theology’ in English.

Traditionally theology (from ‘Theos’ in Greek which means ‘God’, and ‘logos’ which means the ‘word’, or ‘study of’) has meant the study of all things pertaining to God. When we add the additional meanings from Arabic we can infer that ‘theology’ is both the ‘science’ of the study of God, and also the (presence of the) divinity of God Himself. Thus when we speak of Ritual Theology we are studying both the theology of the rituals of the Holy Church, and also, through this study, we can simply understand and learn of theological understandings and spiritual meanings seen in the rituals practised.

The science of theology is so broad that it has tended to be separated into various related disciplines. At the root, or the base, of these divisions is systematic theology (sometimes

termed 'theoretical theology'), which is the branch of theology that deals with God Himself, His characteristics and attributes, as well as the systematic study of the theological underpinnings of the Holy Trinity. Related to this study are the smaller, but still very significant, strands of theology: dogmatic; spiritual; moral; pastoral etc. Each of these branches of study is concerned with how we may understand God's revelation to us and how we may reach a true knowledge of Him. Naturally this study is founded upon the Holy Bible which is the core of tradition, and which is the foundation from which we may verify the teachings and authority of the Church itself. It follows that our study will be based very firmly upon the biblical traditions of our Fathers.

When we examine the rituals of the Holy Church we are not concerned solely with studying them in themselves (their order, their practices etc), nor even with penetrating the spiritual depths and meaning which underpin these rituals (while this is very important to our life in the church), but more than any other motivation we are trying to find the presence of God in these ritual procedures. It follows that, as we examine the ceremonies of the Church we shall be trying to determine exactly what point the Holy Spirit, through the Church, is trying to make clear to us. In other words, we shall be attempting to come close to the rituals of the Church in order to find which particular concept and fact is embodied in each ritual, thus we can determine whether one specific practice refers to the Father Himself, or to our Lord Jesus Christ, and if the latter, which ones refer to His Incarnation, His life, His Crucifixion, His Burial, His Resurrection from the dead, His Ascension and so on. Thus our goal is to examine the rituals so as to understand the practice (its meaning and spiritual significance) and thereby how we may relate this understanding to Christ our Lord, and thus to come closer to Him.

From the above we can attempt a fuller definition of the aims of studying Ritual theology, to gain an understanding of the theology and divinity of the rituals of the Holy Church, to find God in the praises offered to Him from within the Church herself and ideally to discover that this knowledge will lead me to God Himself.

It seems that many people understand that the word 'ritual' means not much more than the 'order' of the Church's services. Thus some will say that a study of the Church rituals is simply a study of how they are done, and the order in which they are completed. It is true, in fact, to say that the order of the rituals is very important as the rituals were designed by the Holy Spirit to lead us ever-increasingly towards perceiving God, and to have Him embodied in our minds, eyes and understanding. It is significant that a simple man or woman, uneducated in the study of theology, will, if he or she simply follows the rituals and practices in full with the understanding which this engenders, be led towards God and will develop an appreciation for the fundamental theological teachings of the Church. Nevertheless, this is one of the profound beauties of our Church – that, whilst the simple will experience God through the rituals of the Church, those who wish to study the practices of the Church more deeply will be amply rewarded for their trouble.

A study of the rituals of the Church will reveal how the Holy Spirit has arranged the services throughout the year to reveal a deep and abiding knowledge of the story of Christianity itself, of Christ Himself, and for the sacrifice he made to redeem us all following the Fall of mankind. The round of rituals of the whole Coptic year will reinforce our understanding of the whole of Christ's life in the flesh on Earth for our salvation; His Incarnation, life, Crucifixion, death and His holy Resurrection. The rituals also teach us about the establishment of our beloved Church here on earth through our Redemption by the blood of

our Saviour on the Cross. Indeed, as we contemplate in the struggling Church on earth, our minds are drawn heavenward to a vision of the other half of the Church, which is the Victorious Church in Paradise. For the Church on earth is but one part of the Church, the Body of Christ is comprised of that part which struggles in its earthly life here, as well as that part which is victorious in Paradise and all are bound together in the one Body.

The rituals, arranged by the Holy Spirit, raise our souls, step by step, towards this victorious Church. It is through the practices of the Church that all the faithful desire Heaven and strive towards achieving it. The believer, who lives the life of the Church through her rituals, will live in the depths of our Lord Jesus Christ and will be led gradually to unity in Christ Himself. Indeed, this may explain to us why our Lord Jesus Christ would attend the synagogue every Saturday with the Jews. He did not go because he needed to, of course, but simply in order to teach us that without a Church and her rituals, we cannot survive in Christ or, ultimately, in God Himself.

What is Ritual Theology all about?

Though in the time available to us I shall try to cover as much as I am able with regard to the science of theology, and all that, which pertains to it, I doubt that we will be able to cover all that it contains. But at least you will have an idea of the subject, and of its sub-sections. Thus when you come to examine ritual theology you will be aware that it contains pure theology, pure tradition, pure Bible study and pure spirituality which you can clearly discern for yourselves once you practise the rituals with understanding.

Ritual Theology covers such subjects as:

- The church building itself and the spiritual nature of ecclesiastical architecture.
- The furnishings and interior of the church building
- The functions of the furnishings and ritual objects
- The study of iconography and iconology (i.e. the theology of the icons)
- The design of the exterior and interior of the church building itself
- The essential areas of the interior (The Iconostasis, the Baptistry, the Sanctuary etc)
- The origins and study of the function of these portions of the church building
- The ceremonial practices of the Sacraments
- The church hymnody and hymnology (the study of the Church tunes, hymns etc)
- The origin and foundation of Coptic hymnody, as well as their construction
- The spirituality and theology of the various Feasts of the Coptic Year
- The fixed calendar of Feasts, as well as 'variable' Feasts
- The categories of service books of the Church
- The hidden mystery of the order of the readings of the Church etc.

Whenever you visit a Church you will be aware of the readings of the Holy Mass, the Gospel of evening incense raising ('vespers'), the Gospel of morning incense raising ('matins'), the Pauline Epistle, the Catholicon, the Praxis (Acts) as well as the Gospel of the Mass etc. Have you ever wondered why each reading has been chosen by the Holy Spirit for a particular day, and how they are related to one another? Why is it that some of these praises are mixed together in particular ways and at particular times? What about the different praises offered at specific times such as Pentecost, and the rules which govern their use? Have you ever wondered about the oils used in the Church, for instance, or any other of the materials employed in the Sacraments, or indeed what conditions apply to the offering of certain materials? To be honest, a course such as this one could easily be divided into five or six

sections, and each section turned into a course of its own. Nevertheless we will examine each in as much detail as time allows and, by means of these notes, coupled with those you have each taken from the seminars, you may leave with a much improved knowledge of the rituals of the Coptic Orthodox Church.

Why do we need to study Ritual Theology?

There are many reasons why we, especially, need to study the rituals of our Holy Church. It is quite true to say that of all the Christian churches in the world, ours has maintained the rituals which were used by our ancestors in the Faith many centuries ago – indeed, even from the beginning of Christianity. So we should examine the ceremonial practices of our Church to put us in tune with the worship, which has gone on in the Coptic Church without change from its very beginnings.

It is also true to suggest that it is likely that our Church conducts some of the longest services of any Christian denomination. A knowledge of the theological meanings which underlie the rituals will enhance our enjoyment of these long services and mean that you, like me, will never find the long services boring. Indeed, I find that I enjoy the long services very much and that they are truly rewarding – so much so that I wish I could go back to the monastery where we used to pray the Holy Mass in its fuller form, which is much longer again. And we did it every day! At the moment you attend the English Mass here and feel that it is long – much longer than the services of the Anglican or the Roman Catholic churches – but you would be shocked to learn that the Coptic Mass which you attend is in fact half, or even less than half, of the full proper Coptic Mass which is prayed in Coptic with its original tunes. In fact here I am speaking about the basic liturgy of St. Basil, which we use today, but if we were to pray the Mass of St. Gregory, with its distinct long tunes in Coptic, you would find that from the recitation of the Creed until the end of the Mass would take at least four hours. And this does not include everything that came before the Creed.

I should confess that out of curiosity this year and last year I have examined the newspapers, such as the 'Leader' or the local newspapers during Easter time (here I am using the terms you know, though I should like to call 'Good Friday' by its correct name of 'The Holy Great Friday', and 'Easter' by the proper term 'The Feast of the Resurrection' and 'Christmas' by the term 'The Feast of the Birth of our Lord Jesus Christ'), and I have discovered that the longest service on the whole page is two hours, whilst as you well know, ours goes from 8am through until 6pm. And even so, we are pushing to finish everything in time! And what about the vigil of Joyous Saturday? It seems that no-one else but us does this service any more. For myself, I know that in church we start at 10:30pm and do not finish until 6:30 or 7am, whilst in the monastery we would begin at 10pm and not finish until 8am! In fact, I once attended the vigil, or overnight watch, at Deir El-Muharraq (the Monastery of the Holy Virgin) in upper Egypt. There we read the entire book of the Apocalypse, or Revelation, in Coptic and then repeated it in Arabic!

From the above we must recognise that our Coptic Orthodox church is indeed a unique one. On some occasions, I have met with various ministers and priests from other churches and they have often been shocked when I explain the length and nature of our services. I have sometimes felt that they must think that we are not from here at all, but from another planet! Some years ago, when Barry Unsworth was State Premier, we would conduct with him and various religious leaders a monthly prayer breakfast in the Rockdale region. In the other churches it was the habit to begin eating and, after 25 minutes of eating, we would then pray

for 5 minutes (some with food still in their mouths!). When it came to my turn to host the prayer breakfast, I began with a prayer before eating, which surprised many. When I began with 'In the Name of the Father, and the Son ... etc' a large number were amazed and thought it was some sort of heresy as they had never prayed that way before. This might indicate to you just how far many of the other Christian denominations have strayed from their origins.

From my experience as a father of Confession for many young people, it has come to my attention that they are often accused by others of being part of a Church, which is 'too strict' and has 'much too long rituals' which 'are not understood by the faithful'. This is an accusation which is still made. It is to address this accusation that we have begun studying this course in the rituals of the Holy Coptic Orthodox Church, so that this generation may be well able to answer such erroneous beliefs for themselves and, in so doing, follow the instructions of St. Peter who told us to:

"...sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you ..." (1 Peter 3:16)

It is for this reason that I shall begin this study of the rituals of the Holy Church with an examination of their sources, in fact, I have not needed to go beyond the writings from the Holy Apostolic Fathers up to the First Ecumenical Council of Nicea in 325. Before this time the Church was undivided so this should be sufficient proof that our Church was not following anything unoriginal or false, or indeed was just a continuation of the Old Testament worship and priesthood. The result of this survey of the sources from the earliest centuries of Christianity will prove that we are following the Lord Jesus Christ in truth and 'in the Spirit' just as the Holy Bible has informed us. In this context it might be interesting to remember the story of Naboth the Jezreelite (1 Kings 21:1-13) who refused to sell his inheritance of land to his neighbour king Ahab. For this loyalty to the inheritance of his ancestors Naboth was killed. This is a moral lesson for us all, particularly those who have so easily abandoned the traditions and faith of our Fathers.

The Linguistic Origin of the term 'Ritual'

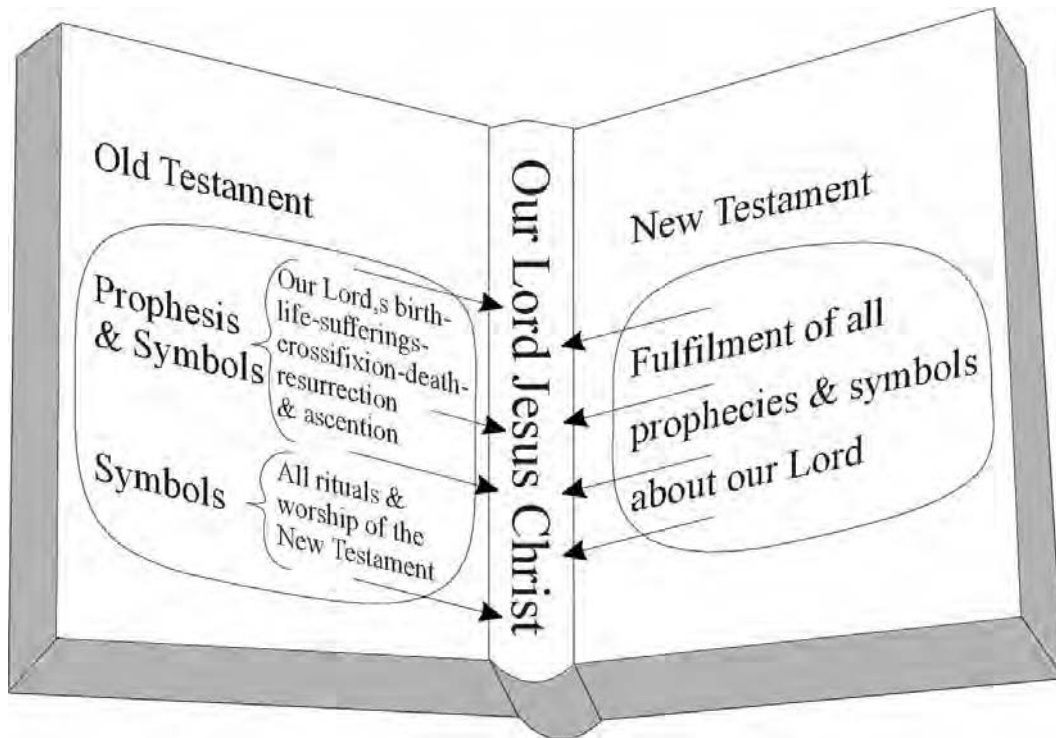
The English word 'Ritual' is a translation of the Coptic word of 'Taxis'. This word refers to the order or rite of the practices and services of the Church, and from it comes the Arabic word 'Tux'. From this term we can understand that the word, in its fullness, refers to the rites or rituals or order of things to be done, so this course on ritual theology will comprise a study of the rites of the Church with special regard for their theology and tradition, belief and spirituality which are their foundation. To aid you in your research of this field there is a set of notes on this topic which I found amongst the previous notes for this course. In fact these notes, detailing the philosophical and psychological roots of ritual, are based upon the writings of His Grace Bishop Gregorios, which were published over thirty years ago. These introductory notes are of benefit, and I advise students to study them.

Our traditional Church and other denominations

Here I should like to emphasize our response to an accusation to which I alluded to earlier – an accusation sometimes made by other Christian denominations whose experience of us is limited – which suggests that the Coptic Church is still living in the Old Testament (or indeed, within the Old Dispensation). This subject could be studied at length but I shall restrict myself to the following:

Ritual Theology

1. It is entirely and abundantly clear from the New Testament that our Lord did not cancel or expunge (destroy) the Old Testament, but that He came to earth in order to fulfil the promise and the symbols of the Old Testament.
2. The rituals of the Old Testament were not dry, lifeless or empty as some claim, but were in fact very deep, rich and alive expressions of worship. Indeed whoever studies the Old Testament closely will find that our Lord Jesus Christ is continually prefigured in its pages (ie He is alluded to in the fullest possible symbolic sense). As we study the rituals of the Church we will appreciate the continuity of the Old and New testaments which both meet in one center; that is OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST. When we examine the rituals of Christian Baptism, we will come to a full understanding of its theological profundity, and then more fully appreciate the sacramental act of Baptism, which exists at the very beginning of the Holy Bible in the first chapter of the Book of Genesis. If we study diligently the books of the Old Testament, as well as the rituals, practices and instructions which they contain, we will be led easily to Jesus Christ, as we will be able to perceive that throughout these books we will encounter many extraordinary symbols of the our Lord Jesus Christ.
3. The symbolic rituals of the Old Testament were not swept away by Our Lord, but were fulfilled and reinvigorated by Him. He did not cancel or end these rituals, but renewed their spiritual meaning in a way which gave them clarity and richness. The rituals which He thus renewed confirm that He is the fulfilment of Old Testament expectation, so they have become spiritually significant and enlivened by the grace of the Holy Spirit. Therefore the rituals of the Church are a continuation of the rituals of the Old Testament, but because they are empowered by the Holy Spirit in a profoundly spiritual sense they provide for us a means of salvation. We should remember that our Lord, Who created us and Who knows we live in limited flesh, also knows that we are affected by the physical world around us. It follows, that He has provided rituals for us as He knows that their practice influences and motivates us, and moves us deeply inside. For this reason He instituted the rituals of the Old Testament and continued them, in a wholly spiritual way, in the New Testament.
4. To suggest that the Old Testament is one thing, and the New Testament is another, or to say that they have no linkage between them, is simply wrong. The Holy Bible is comprised of two sections, an Old and a New Testament, with one leading as a natural progression to the other. In actual fact, we can understand the Bible most effectively in the following way: Open a book., imagine that on one side you have the Old Testament with all of its rites and practices and on the other side you have the New Testament with the establishment of the Church and all of her rites and practices. In a basic and simple way we can see that both of them lead to our Lord Jesus Christ, and for anyone to suggest that we follow the Old Testament alone is an indication that perhaps they do not understand the Bible at all. (see illustration next page)



5. The thing that makes the Old Testament highly important in the life of the Church is that God Himself ordered all that was done in it. As you all know there is a verse in the Holy Bible which tells us that the Holy Bible is the book of God, and all what is in it is inspired by the Holy Spirit to the holy men to write it. Further, we are told that God is the same as He was yesterday, today and tomorrow. He never changes. How then can we expect that the multitude of rites and forms of worship, which He instituted in the Old Testament, and described in minute detail to Moses, are now somehow cancelled or made redundant? Has God changed His mind? Certainly not! If it is the same God Whom we worship today, as they did during the Old Testament times, then surely He requires of us similar worship and rites.

I just wished to mention to you these answers to the accusation that we are a Church of the Old Testament as you may well be faced with similar questions and opinions in your life as a teacher or servant. During our study we will return again and again to the origins of the worship and rites of the Old Testament in order to come to a fuller understanding about how these practices of Old and New have been united in the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ.

RITUAL THEOLOGY I

SECTION ONE

Introduction

1. It is now time to turn to the sources of the rituals, as well as to their theological foundation. The sources of the rituals of the Church are as follows:
2. The Holy Bible
3. The Books of the Holy Apostles
4. The writings of the Apostolic Fathers
5. The writings of the disciples of the Holy Apostles, the first generation after the Apostolic Fathers
6. The writings of the Fathers of the Church, her scholars and teachers, during the first four centuries before the Council of Nicea in 325, which have great relevance as they come from the period in which the Churches of the world were united in Christ.
7. The Books of the Church which detail the orders of service. The oldest is named “The Order of the Holy Church of God”, a very large book which is kept in the Patriarchal Library in Egypt. There are other smaller books which further explain the rituals of the Church.

We shall study these sources for ritual from a couple of perspectives:

1. The importance of these resources as references with undoubted merits
2. Assessing the order of importance of these sources, and to ascertain which parts contain commentary or instruction on ritual.

Another important area for study is the depiction of rituals within the Holy Bible itself. As this is an extremely broad and profound topic, it requires a great deal of examination and so we may select this field of investigation as an assignment topic.

The importance of the resources which support rituals

The ancient resources that contain materials relating to rituals are of the greatest importance for the Holy Church and its ritual life for the following reasons:

1. The origins of the rites of the Church are portrayed within their historical context;
2. What valuable spiritual insights into faith and theology which these early resources offer.

The Historical Context

1. The first of these ancient resources which chronicle the ritual life of the Church are the two books of the Holy Apostles which are filled with their teachings. They are known by the names The Didascalia and The Didache. They were completed by the Holy Apostles after the Holy Spirit descended upon them in the upper room of Zion, the room belonging to the family of St. Mark which was used by our Lord for the Last Supper. It must be remembered that all of the Apostles’ words and teachings were directed by the Holy Spirit, as we can determine from Acts 15:28:

“For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things.”

We will begin our study of the sources of rituals from the writings of the Holy Fathers who lived and wrote before the First Ecumenical Council of Nicea in 325, they are often called the Ante-Nicene Fathers. The importance of these writings can be ascertained from their historical importance as documents which chronicle the earliest times of the Christian Church. They begin with the writings and canons of the Holy Apostles which were written following a couple of extraordinary important events. In the first place these writings comprise the materials which our Lord taught directly to the Apostles during His Life among us on earth. In the second place (though no less importance) come the writings which come from the period during which the Lord stayed with the Apostles following His Resurrection from the dead. As it is written in the Book of Acts, our Lord spent 40 days with the Apostles following His Resurrection and during this time He taught them all manner of things pertaining to the Church and to the Kingdom of God and heaven. We might well ask ourselves where these writings are recorded? When we go through the gospels thoroughly we may well find 25 or 26 occasions where these private teachings are mentioned, yet the substance of them is never recorded in words. In fact when we come to the end of the Gospels, (i.e. to the end of the Gospel of St. John) we discover that the Blessed Apostle suggests to us that if all the things which our Lord Jesus Christ both did and taught to His Apostles were to have been recorded, then the world itself would not be enough to contain the books written. Where are these writings then? Surely they are of prime importance?

To answer these questions we must remember the so-called “Paraclete” chapters of the Gospel of St. John (ie John 14-17). In these chapters, which are always read in full in the very first hour of the evening of the Holy Great Friday during the Holy Pascha, our Lord told the Holy Apostles that when the Holy Spirit comes, “He will teach you all things, and bring to you remembrance all things that I said to you” (John 14:26). It follows that when the Holy Spirit had come upon them, and their minds were filled with the remembrance of all of our Lord’s teachings, they recorded them very carefully in words as instructions and canons so that the Church would be organised and its rituals administered exactly according to the wishes which our Lord expressed to His Apostles.

In fact, if we examine the Book of Acts, Chapter 15, we will find a mention about the very first ecumenical council of the Church, the so-called Jerusalem Council, comprising of the Holy Apostles themselves, and conducted in the year 50 after our Lord. The Apostles sat together and prayed and then discussed a number of matters pertaining to the Church. Their conclusions were written down for all of the congregations to see. This letter contained the words, “It seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us ...” (Acts 15:28) which indicates to us that everything they said, as well as everything they wrote, was completed under the direction of the Holy Spirit, and thus in accord with the will of God.

2. The second generation of writings from which we can learn much with regard to the rituals of the Holy Church are those of the Apostolic Fathers, who themselves were the direct disciples of the Holy Apostles. These Holy Fathers lived with the Apostles and were taught directly by them. This established the chain of teaching whereby the words and instructions of our Lord Himself were delivered intact from one generation to the next. It is wrong, then, to deny the genuineness of these writings, particularly when we consider that this ‘chain of transmission’ was spoken of directly by St. Paul, who tells his disciples that what he has given them, they must also give to others – on the condition that they are honest people who are able to keep the faith and deliver it to the holy

Apostolic Fathers – to transmit the teachings of the Apostles to the next generation, and the process would continue.

The period of the Apostolic Fathers covers the time from around the year 50/60 A.D. (ie the period following the period of the martyrdom of the first Apostles) until about 90/100 A.D. We should remember that the last Apostle to die was St. John the Beloved who reposed in the Lord in the year 104 A.D., the only Apostle not to have been called to a martyr's death. Thus we can here see a cross-over between the period of the Apostles and the first generation of Apostolic Fathers who were taught by them. This process continues to the present day with the elders of the Church teaching those who are junior to them in the Faith. So it was that the third generation of Holy Fathers are those we call the Ante-Nicene Fathers (those who wrote before the First Council, and who received their instructions in a direct line from the Apostles and Apostolic Fathers, and so on).

It is important here to observe that we have further cause to believe categorically all things taught to us by the Apostolic and Ante-Nicene (“post-Apostolic”) Fathers. We must remember that these Fathers lived in very dangerous times and underwent much persecution at the hands of both the Roman and the Jewish authorities. In fact we know that many of the Jews wanted to destroy everything to do with Christianity from a very early period. In fact if we examine Acts 5:28 we notice that the Jewish authorities arrested the Apostles and forcibly reminded them that they did not wish to hear the name of Jesus Christ and that the Apostles were not allowed to preach – indeed, the Apostles were beaten for their evangelising. It is important to recognise then that the writings of the Apostles and early Fathers were not written as an individual today may write a book (that is for enjoyment), but were written under severe persecution. It is no exaggeration to say that these writings were penned in the authors' blood, because the Fathers practised every word they wrote and were martyred as a result. The price of these writings was the lives of the Fathers, their possessions, their honour, their dignity, and in fact their very existence as human beings.

- The inherent difficulties in studying the material

Another point to emphasise in our examination of the early writings of the Church Fathers is that the references to ritual and the ceremonial practices of the Church may be scattered through many books, with a sentence here and there which relates to ritual, so we have to be patient and conscientious in examining the sources to discover all of the relevant material. The reasons for this are as follows:

1. The difficulty which exists in describing and explaining the rituals of the Church, as well as the mystery of the Sacraments, to those who are pagans and do not understand the language used.

An example of this difficulty is evident when we read the passage about Nicodemus in the Gospel of St. John, chapter 3. Nicodemus was a teacher of the law, aware of the Old Testament in detail, a prominent person amongst the Jews and he knew St. John the Baptist, yet even he could not understand the significance of Baptism. How much more difficult it would be then for a pagan who knows nothing of the Jewish tradition of the Old Testament, to understand such a thing. Imagine if I took a pagan and showed him some water and said that I, as a priest, could pray over the water and by washing him with it grant to him a new nature. It is certain he would not understand anything I was saying. Thus the brave early Church Fathers had to contend with great ignorance and employed terms with which people identified. It could not have been easy!

2. The difficult circumstances within the early Church

The situation which the Church faced was very hard and challenging and they were often misunderstood. For example, we know that when we begin the Mass with the offertory we are offering a sacrifice. We also know that the priest who officiates at the service is called “to receive the sacrifice” on behalf of the congregation. Well, in the early times, when many of the pagans heard this they thought that a human sacrifice was being offered, so sometimes the pagans or the civil authorities or the army attacked the Church to stop such a sacrifice. This is just one amongst many misunderstandings with which the early Fathers had to deal.

3. In the early centuries, the Church was understandingly hesitant about new-believers. The Fathers were concerned that those who knew a little about Christianity, but did not accept Christ in their hearts, might go out and tell others what they knew, and that what they said would be misinterpreted.

In fact in the early centuries unbelievers (the unbaptised) were kept for three or more years under instruction in the Faith, and they were not allowed to attend the Mass of the Faithful and were told to leave the Mass after the Creed and the first Prayer of Reconciliation. In proof of this, you might like to examine the writings of some Holy Fathers like St. Ignatius of Lyons or St. Polycarp of Smyrna, both of whom were disciples of St. John the Beloved. In their sermons, which we have copies of today, and which were delivered after the Gospel while the catechumens (the unbaptised persons who were taking instruction in the Faith) are still present in the church; the fathers at the end of the sermon used to ask them to leave the church. For the catechumens here, the fathers’ speeches were as if ‘under a veil, under a cover’ and the fathers always used terms such as ‘there are many other things which I will tell you when we are alone’. The meaning of this is clear, that much more would be revealed when the baptised members of the Church were together alone. Thus we can see how the Fathers of the Church kept much of their teachings for the baptised members of the congregation and did not let it get into the hands of the ignorant for fear that Christian teachings may be misrepresented or twisted. They remembered clearly the words of our Lord that we are not to throw our pearls or our precious things before swine and dogs, as they may trample them underfoot and destroy them. The Church was rightly very cautious and thus was able to keep her rites and ceremonies correct and properly administered. For this reason it requires a well-educated person to read the writings of the early Fathers in order to extract from them what there is to know about rituals, ritual theology, tradition and so on. So it often happens that one line or one paragraph will contain small amounts of information for the interested reader.

- **Why are the writings of the Apostles and the Apostolic Fathers of such importance?**
- No-one can doubt the references in Holy Scripture, that is, the Holy Bible, which refer to ritual practice. Equally no-one can doubt the authenticity and authority of the writings and canons of the holy apostles. The area of contention for some, exists in the period following the apostolic fathers. Though we employ many of the writings of the post-apostolic fathers, and those who wrote after the first council at Nicea, within the Church, when we discuss the rituals and teachings of the Church, we normally rely heavily on the writings of the Pre-Nicene Fathers (ie pre-325 AD). The reasons for this are as follows:
 1. The period which stretched from the Holy Apostles to the First Council was one in which Christendom (the universal Christian Church) was one in Faith, and all teachings and practices were common. In fact, if you were to have attended a Mass anywhere in the

Christian world at the time before Nicea, you would have discovered that all things were identical in matters of Faith. The rituals, the dates of celebrating the fasts and feasts, the construction of the Holy Mass, and the rest, were all common in the doctrine of the Faith. The only differences were to be found in culture and language. In fact, the most obvious sign of the differences in culture was the hymnody of each Church (ie the hymns and chants used in services). As we know the hymns of the Church contain within themselves the spiritual, theological, and traditional teachings of the Church, but they may well be chanted in tunes to match the culture of the people involved. In Egypt, for example, the people inherited the wondrous tunes from the era of the Pharaohs which they particularly loved and which they applied to the hymns of the Church. In other areas, such as Europe, you would find a very different culture and so the tunes would be equally different, and equally specific to the place and people, though the teachings would be identical.

2. During this early period the Church was still establishing herself in a hostile environment and her services were being held in secret, often underground or in caves. This secret worship was conducted, not to avoid persecution, but so the various forms of persecution would not spoil the Sacraments or the reverence given to them. Further, during this time, the Church was growing towards its gradual completion in writings and so forth for, though the Church was established fully in the time of the Apostles, the Apostolic and Pre-Nicene Fathers made sure to record all that they knew and experienced in order to pass it onto future generations. We should remember St. Paul informing his disciple St. Timothy to keep and to pass-on everything he has learned to good and faithful disciples that it may be maintained. We should here remember the concluding passage from the Prayer for the Congregation of the Holy Saints from the liturgy which states that just as it was, so shall it be from generation to generation.
3. In this period the majority of the most terrible heresies and heretics appeared in the Church; up to 90-95% of the major heresies in the history of the Church. The heretics could not, or chose not to, understand the high values and standards required by true Christianity; they were caught between wishing to appear as true Christians (and leaders to other Christians) and the desire to continue their lives as they had before conversion. As a result they chose to force the two paths into one instead of undergoing a true spiritual conversion; often this resulted in terrible heresy. A heresy is a wrong understanding or a wrong teaching about the faith and the teachings or practices of the Church. Against such heretics the whole Church came together in unity, led by the Holy Spirit and the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ. The entire Church argued and debated against these heretics and answered them with strong and irrefutable proofs from the Bible in order to maintain the purity of the original teachings from our Lord and the Apostles. From this period we might remember that during the First Ecumenical Council held in Nicea in 325, King Constantine, the first Christian king, attempted to count the bishops as they entered and departed from the council room. As the bishops entered, he counted 318; as they were seated he counted 319. He repeated the exercise a number of times and was confused – he then asked the head of the council to explain the dilemma. The head stated that the extra person was in fact our Lord Jesus Christ Who had said that where 2 or 3 were gathered in His Name, He would be in their midst. This presence of our Lord amidst the deliberations indicates the value of the writings of the Pre-Nicene Fathers.

4. An important means of determining the validity and truthfulness of the writings of the Pre-Nicene Fathers is to notice the humility and reverence with which each of them wrote. Regularly they would refer to the Fathers who had come before them as the real authorities. Thus St. Athanasius the Apostolic used regularly to refer to the Fathers who lived before him in the second generation of Christianity. This is an indication of the holiness of a man who, though only 19 years old and a deacon at the time of the First Ecumenical Council, was the one voice who spoke above all of the bishops and who drafted the Creed. Yet he, in humility, referred to the writings of the Fathers who preceded him. The same is true for Pope St. Dioscoros who constantly referred to St. Cyril, the 24th in the order of the Patriarchs with the words, "Our holy father St. Cyril said ...".

Spiritual Insights

Aside from what these early writings offer us in terms of their historical value as testimonials to the activities of early Church, we need also to study their value as repositories of faith and theology.

1. These writings were not produced simply in order to publish books or to fill libraries or even to please kings and emperors, but they were completed by holy men who knew before they began that they must write of the Church in all her strength and glory, even though the price might not be measured by money but by their own blood.
2. These holy men suffered greatly in their writings in terms of financial, emotional and physical loss. They often paid not only with their possessions and all of their honour and dignity, but also with their blood simply so as to pass on to others the faith which had been delivered unto them. There are many examples. St. Timothy, a young deacon in Egypt, was beaten to death by the Arians as he wished to prevent them using the holy alter and Sanctuary for their sacrifices.
3. As we read the writings of these holy fathers we can detect the depth of their understanding and we can notice that their eyes have been raised to heaven as their hands write. We feel the bravery and purity of their writing as they are prepared to write what needs to be written regardless of the potential for physical harm and danger which stands over them.
4. One of the values of these writings, especially the Fathers of the first generations after the Council of Chalcedon in 415 A.D. (in which the Church was divided into two), is that we can recognise that the number of our Orthodox believers grew, even under strict and terrible persecution from the hands of opposing Christians. This growth was attributable to the insistence of the early Fathers that the teachings of the earliest times be recorded and passed on from one generation to the next.

All of the above points emphasise to us the very real historical, spiritual and theological value of the resources of the early Church as contained in the writings of the Early Fathers. We should incorporate what they have to teach us into our lives and apply these teachings just as we do the teachings of the Holy Bible.

RITUAL THEOLOGY I

SECTION TWO

Biblical References for The Rituals

Introduction

We will now examine in depth a very important topic for Sacramental Theology that is the Biblical origins of the rituals of the Church. We will touch in this section the Biblical references to rituals, and when we come to the explanation of the rituals there we shall refer regularly to the Holy Bible in every instance. We should remember that every single word in the Mass has a biblical precedent and reference. In passing, we can wonder at those who deny or reject the rituals which we employ with the excuse that such rituals are not mentioned in the New Testament. Often people accuse us of using practices which are from the Old Testament and that our Lord came to 'cancel' such way of worship. In the last lecture I explained the extraordinary unity and oneness of both the Old and New testaments in our Lord Jesus Christ and that the two are united in one centre which is Him. Both are very clearly pointing to our Lord Jesus Christ.

If we examine the first chapters of the Holy Bible we will notice that the rituals of the Church are there explained physically, ritually, theologically and in terms of tradition. We notice that God Himself explained the order of worship in every detail down to the most minute. Anyone who studies these passages in detail will notice that in each of these rituals there is a strong symbolism of our Lord Jesus Christ. Each of these practices, including such small details as numbers, is a reminder of our Lord Himself and, as such, is established by God that we might constantly aim towards the target of Salvation in order to reach heaven at the end and be with our Lord.

Some Examples of Rituals in the Holy Bible

Firstly The Old Testament

A. Genesis

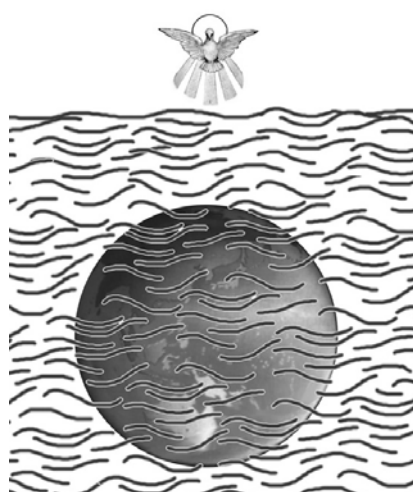
1. Baptism

Have you noticed that in the very first two verses of the Bible are explained some of the sacraments of the Church in full detail? What is the first Sacrament of the Church? Baptism. Baptism is the door to the church.

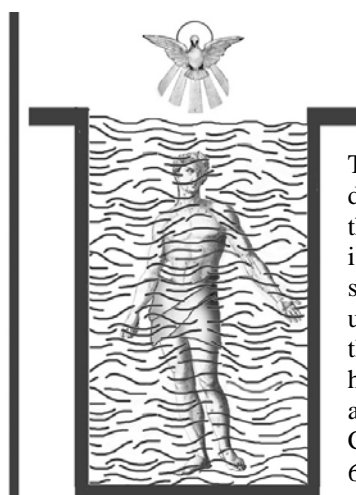
A superficial understanding of Baptism is that the priest comes to Church in the morning and fills a huge basin with water. Then the family comes with the child to be baptised and the priest immerses the child in that water. The child then becomes a Christian. But the reality is that; through the prayers with rituals practised by an officiated priest, the Holy Spirit comes upon the water and makes it a holy material for the work of the Holy Spirit. When the catechumen comes, there are prayers by the priest which are prayed on the person with oil-anointing and rituals. Then that person is immersed into the water with certain prayers recited; the person comes out of the water having been transferred from darkness to light. We believe that by this, the person receives the new nature in Christ our Lord. We also

believe that the baptised person becomes a spiritual bride for our Lord Jesus Christ, and accordingly is luminous with spiritual light (which is why we dress the person in white clothing). We are further reminded that this person will now start to grow and enjoy the fruits of the Holy Spirit.

It is really amazing to find this practice mentioned above is explained in the first three verses of the whole Bible (Genesis 1: 1-3). Referring to these three verses in depth, we begin to understand the relationship between the Old and the New Testaments. The verses say that in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth, and that the earth was without form and was void. The Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters and then God said, *'Let there be light'*. There was light and then God saw that the light was good. After this God began the creation of the visible order (fruitful plants and trees etc). Let us understand that in the beginning earth was fully covered with water and there was darkness over it and it was void. But the Spirit of God hovered over the waters and, after God's command, light appeared. These verses refer directly to the person being baptised. For every person is born in sin and his physical body is originally made of the earth. Referring to (psalm 51:5) it states that every human is born in sin and iniquity. In addition, the Bible always symbolises the life of sin by darkness, because the sinner is away from our Lord Who is the True Light; and also at the birth of our Lord to save us from sin, it was said about Him that He is "a light shining upon those who are in darkness and the shadows of death" (Luke 1: 79). So by this any new born person until he is baptised is in darkness and also is without form and void (as originally we should be in the image and likeness of God which we lost by sin). When this person comes to baptism and is immersed inside the water, here he is like the earth in (Genesis 1:1 -3) which was void and without form, in darkness and covered by the water. Return to the person, and to verse 3 in Genesis 1; as after the Holy Spirit hovered over the waters and God ordered light, it became so and the earth started to take its beautiful form. Exactly the same happens to the baptised; while he is inside the water, with the prayers of the priest, the Holy Spirit is doing the same to him to change him from darkness to light and to be on the beautiful image and likeness of our Lord. And that is why we say that he had the new nature in our Lord Jesus Christ.



The earth was void, in darkness, covered by the water and the Spirit of God hovering on the face of the waters (Genesis 1: 1-3)



The person (made of the dust of the earth) under the water before baptism is void and in darkness of sin – with the Holy Spirit upon the water through the sacramental prayer, he gets the new nature and lives in the light of Christ our Lord (Romans 6: 2-5 & John 8: 12)

Continuing in Genesis chapter 1, we find that after the water dispersed from the face of the earth, the earth produced the beautiful fruitful plants. The same happens to the baptised person, that after baptism he is anointed with the Holy Chrism through which the Holy Spirit dwells inside him. Then the baptised partakes of the Body and Blood of the Lord to abide in the Lord. This changes the life of that person (especially if he was an adult) and starts to live in Christ and show the fruits of the Holy Spirit in his life. By this, he becomes a light for others through his good works (refer to Matthew 5: 16).

You see from this explanation that the whole ritual practice of the first sacrament (baptism), and even the growth of the person's spiritual life through his continuous practice of the other sacraments of the church, is explained simply in the first few verses in the first chapter of the whole Bible. This can answer the people who say that there are no rituals in the Bible. This claim of theirs shows that they do not understand the Bible in depth; as the Lord said "*You are mistaken, not knowing the scriptures nor the power of God*" (Matthew 22: 29). The Lord also commanded us to "search the books" (John 5: 39)

It is also amazing that John the Baptist was baptising with immersing people in the waters of the Jordan. He always used to tell them that he is just baptising with water; but after him is coming Who will baptise them with the water and the Spirit (he means our Lord Jesus Christ). This is another proof for a ritual sacramental practice which is carried in the New Testament but mentioned in the Old Testament, in the same first few verses of Genesis chapter 1 as explained before.

Another beautiful understanding we can find in the same verses of Genesis 1, which appears to be telling in a simple way the story of the creation, but looking more deeply into them we find another beautiful spiritual meaning that applies on the life of a Christian person who is really growing in Christ our God. When the person arises from the water he or she begins to live in the light of Christ and is worthy to accept Christ inside him or her. And just as following the Creation of the Light, God made fruits and every living thing, so too the newly baptised member of the Church walks into a new creation and will begin to grow within himself the fruits of the Holy Spirit. As he grows in Christ he will begin to preach to others and will thus yield inside himself the seeds of the faith and spread it amongst others upon the earth. So too, just as the birds are created to fly in the heavens, so too after baptism are we supposed to fly spiritually above the material desires of this earth. Here we see that the first two verses of Genesis echo our lives as new Christians and the creation and recreation (through baptism) have parallels, just as do the Old and New Testaments – one cannot exist 'in Light' without the other.

The above is just one example of a Biblical origin of one of our rituals, explained theologically and in terms of tradition. Here are others;

2. The day of the Lord

If we continue reading within the first chapter, we notice that after the six days of Creation, God rested on the seventh. I am sure that you will all agree with me that God does not require rest, or that he suffers from tiredness or toil! Yet this teaches us from the very beginning that there is a day of the Lord and that the true rest is in the Lord Himself. The spiritual meaning of rest is that we rest in the Lord by abiding in Him, attending the church and having Holy Communion. Also as much as we can to spend the rest of the day in spiritual practices (prayers, reading, spiritual meetings etc...). This is another very important dogmatic teaching for our traditions of the church; by asking all the believers as much as it is possible to sanctify and keep the day of the Lord (the Sunday) to the Lord Himself.

3. The necessity of sacrifice for forgiveness

As we read Genesis chapter three which documents the fall of Adam and Eve, we will discover the very first roots of the tradition and rituals of salvation by the sacrifice of blood. We know that Adam and Eve disobeyed God, they discovered their nakedness and had the feelings of shame and embarrassment. They took leaves from a fig tree to cover their nakedness which did not work. Our merciful God, after confronting them with their sin, covered them with tunics of animal skin (Genesis 3: 21). Stopping here with a deeper look into this incident; to make tunics of animal skin, an animal should be slaughtered; and this is the way of animal sacrifice of the whole Old Testament. It is as if here God is telling from the very beginning that the forgiveness of sin will not take place without a blood sacrifice. You see with me that this is a very early telling about how the Lord will save us by offering Himself a True Sacrifice slaughtered on the cross to pay the punishment of our sins.

There is something that makes me wonder here about some other churches who replaced the ritual liturgy prayers and the Holy Communion with just a loaf of normal bread put on table. Then they sit down singing some songs and reading some sections of the New Testament, and then everyone eats a piece of that loaf with some juice or soft drink. Where is this practice from what we explained about the sacrifice of blood to forgive the sin, and about the lengthy chapters in the book of Leviticus explaining the different sacrifices? Also where this practice of theirs stands in front of what the Lord said to His disciples in the upper room of Zion “for My Flesh is food indeed, and My Blood is drink indeed. He who eats My Flesh and drinks My Blood abides in Me and I in him” (John 6: 55,56). You all see in our holy Orthodox Church, how great and respected is the sacrament of Holy Communion; in which the officiated priest prays on the bread and wine and the Holy Spirit comes to convert them to the Body and Blood of our Lord. Also the priest gives the Body and Blood of the Lord only to the baptised believers and who are ready and worthy for it – here many conditions apply.

4. Another symbol for the necessity of sacrifice

In Genesis chapter four we notice the mention of the building of an altar and the offering of sacrifice. Abel offered a lamb, slaughtered as a full sacrifice. Cain offered an offering of fruits of the earth. God rejected Cain’s sacrifice and accepted Abel’s to indicate that the only acceptable sacrifice (the only thing able to cover sin) was a blood sacrifice. The sign of the acceptance of this sacrifice was by fire coming down from heaven to burn the offering. This is a very early reference to one of our rituals which is mentioned again later in the Book of Leviticus, where a burnt offering must be fully burned in the fire and the Lord will smell within its smoke a ‘sweet aroma’ and be pleased with the sacrifices of His people.

This means that God made it clear to Adam and Eve that the only way He wants sacrifice for forgiveness of sin is slaughtering an animal. It is obvious here that Adam has delivered this information to his children Cain and Abel. Abel who obeyed, God accepted his offering, while God rejected the disobedient offering (Cain). This simply is the tradition which means orders from God Himself delivered from generation to generation.

5. Lessons from Noah’s ark

a) Baptism –

Noah’s ark itself gives us another symbol of baptism, for the 8 people inside were fully immersed in water, given that the ark was surrounded by the waters and was being heavily

rained upon from above. After being delivered from their immersion and enclosure in water, the 8 people were born into a new life. This meaning is reiterated in St. Paul's letter to the Romans, chapter six and also in the epistle of St. Peter. Here it is important to remember that sometimes people justify the ritual of full immersion in Orthodox baptism solely by referring to our Lord's Baptism in the Jordan. Though this is true, it is necessary to recollect that, from the very beginning of the Holy Bible full immersion has been signified and performed, as we see from the first pages of the Old Testament. I will put here the verses of St Peter's letter as an example for this strong relationship between the Old and New testaments (1Peter 3: 18-22)

“for Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit, by whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison, who formerly were disobedient, when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is eight souls, were saved through water.

There is also an antitype which now saves us – that is baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him.”

b) Building of the church –

The ark also is a very clear symbol of building the church. God Himself did not just ask Noah to build an ark, but told him details of exact dimensions of the ark. God specified the height, the width, the material to be used and how to be done. A deep study of this description needs easily two hours to understand it, as it is full of spiritual meaning to the way we build our churches now. This in itself gives us an understanding why we in our church are very specific in the way the church is constructed and built with many fine details inside it. Every single detail in this aspect is referred to a biblical reference and for a spiritual meaning which we will explain later.

c) The importance of sacrifice (Holy Communion) in our lives –

In Genesis chapter 9, you find that just as Noah had come out of the ark, he built an altar and offered an animal sacrifice which is symbol to Holy Communion. This teaches us how important is the continuous practice for the sacraments of the church in our lives, especially those necessary sacraments for salvation (baptism, confirmation, holy communion and repentance & confession).

d) Another lesson of tradition

It is amazing here to notice in the same chapter 9, it says black and white that Noah offered from “the clean animals”. If you search your Bible, you will find that the mention of the law of clean and unclean animals had started only in the book of Leviticus chapter 11. This was in the days of Moses the prophet which was more than a thousand years after Noah. The question here is how would Noah know about this unless it was a tradition ordered by God delivered to Adam then from Adam to generation after generation.

6. More symbols of Holy Communion in the lives of Abraham and Isaac his son

- a) We recollect that wherever Abraham travelled he had with him his altar. And wherever he settled the first thing he used to do was to build the altar and offer an animal

sacrifice which again reinforces the importance of Holy Communion in the believer's life.

- b) When Abraham went for the war to save his nephew Lot, at his return, he met with Melchizedek. Research in the Bible we find for Melchizedek no origin, no father or mother and no roots. He was simply called the High Priest of God and the King of Peace (King of Salem). Of course related to him is the priesthood and the Kingdom of God. Even though Abraham, the father of fathers, was a Patriarch, nevertheless he placed Melchizedek upon a level higher than himself and indeed Abraham offered him 10% of his material goods. Melchizedek accepted Abraham's tithe and, in return, blessed him and gave him bread and wine; this indicates that Melchizedek is a symbol of Christ who is the real King of Peace and the real High Priest, and Who accepts our 10% in money, health, time and service for His Holy Church. From this we see that the officiated priest who is the servant of God; on behalf of God, accepts our 10% for the church and in exchange, the priest does not offer money or presents or the like, but will give the most valuable thing in return; the Precious Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ and blesses us. This practice which is taking place in our daily lives in the church, has been stated in Genesis since that early time (the time of Abraham and Melchizedek)
- c) As we read further we notice God called Abraham to offer his only beloved son as a sacrifice on the mountain. Abraham obeyed and Isaac carried the wood of the altar on his shoulders, to the appointed mountain. There, Abraham built the altar, tied his son Isaac and placed him on it to offer him a sacrifice. You will notice that they reached the appointed mountain on the third day of their travels and that the Lord saved Isaac and returned him alive with his father. We should also notice that our Lord Jesus Christ Himself carried the wood of the cross to offer Himself a sacrifice on our behalf up on the mountain at Golgotha. However, He arose from the dead on the third day and achieved victory over death which had ensnared us because of our sin.

From this we see that the symbol of the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ and his resurrection on the third day was given very early in the Holy Bible.

7. Symbol to the consecration of the holy altar

Reading in Genesis 28 when Jacob was fleeing from his brother Esau and after he walked long distance, he felt tired and slept on a stone under his head. He saw in a dream the ladder extending from earth to heaven and the angels of the Lord are ascending and descending upon it. The Lord Himself from heaven spoke to him to assure him with the blessing and protection and that He will grant this land to Jacob and his children. Jacob awoke up and he was frightened and said "how reverend is this place, this is nothing but the house of God". He prayed and poured oil on the stone and called the place Bethel, which means the house of God. Then he vowed that he will worship the Lord all his life and pay his ten percent to the Lord God from all what God will provide him.

This is simply the origins of the ritual of consecrating a new altar in the church. As for the reverence that Jacob felt in this incident, I can here give a personal witness; I was blessed to accompany his Holiness Pope Shenouda in every place he went to during all his visits to Sydney. I attended the consecration of all the altars in the new churches. In every single one of them, at the end of the prayer when his Holiness pours the Holy Oil (El-mayroun). There is a real feeling of reverence that I cannot describe in words.

From this you can see that since that very early time God has put in the Holy Bible about the altar in the house of God and its consecration.

I would like here to highlight also another point, that Jacob vowed to pay ten percent of all what God will provide him. Searching the Bible thoroughly, you will find that this commandment of the ten percent was not mentioned as a written commandment in the Bible. It mentioned only that when Abraham met with Melchizedek in Genesis 14, he offered him ten percent of the goods. The first written commandment about the ten percent, was in the book of Leviticus given Moses in the law (Leviticus 27: 30), this was about 500 years after the time of Jacob. This again confirms the existence of the tradition delivered through the fathers from generation to generation and its importance is by no means less than the importance of the biblical verses.

B. Exodus

1. The lamb of Passover

Following the same plan of God that salvation is only through bloodshed, if we go to Exodus chapter 11 & 12, we will find it tells about the lamb of Passover. God informed Moses about the Passover in very fine detail. If we study these details, we will find ourselves looking at our Lord Jesus Christ the True Lamb Who offered Himself as a true, eternal and divine sacrifice on the cross for the salvation of all. As the lamb of Passover saved the first born of all the Jews from destruction by the angel and saved the whole nation of Israel from the slavery of Pharaoh, so our Lord Jesus Christ saved us by His sacrifice and blood-shed from the pangs of death and from the devil who is imprisoning us (imprisoning the living with the bonds of sin and the departed in hades).

The biblical understanding here is that Pharaoh who was enslaving the Israelites was a symbol to the devil who was enslaving us by sin, and the only way for us to be saved was through the Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ which was symbolised by the lamb of the Passover. Here we note that the Passover which was an essential part of the Jewish life of worship is simply a symbol for Holy Communion, which is also the most essential part of the Christian life of worship. Also, studying the details or the rituals of the lamb of Passover, we find that it is very much similar to the rituals of the sacraments of Holy Communion. Furthermore, we can see this more clearly, knowing that our church always celebrates every year the Holy Great Thursday (in which the Lord established the sacrament of Holy Communion) on the same day of the Jewish Passover.

2. Another symbol for Baptism

Looking to the order of salvation that God performed with the Israelites, giving them freedom from the slavery of Pharaoh, we find that God ordered them to paint the top and 2 sides of the door frames of their homes with the blood of the lamb; and to eat the lamb in haste. After the angel killed the first-born of the Egyptians, they let the Israelites leave Egypt. The Israelites departed from Egypt in haste, however when they had reached the shore of the Red Sea, Pharaoh regretted letting them go and went after them with his army. God miraculously made the Israelites cross the Red Sea and studying the details of this crossing, you will find that the water was underneath them (the Lord prepared a land for them to walk on in the middle of the sea, and parted the water above it. There was water underneath that land), on their right and left, and the cloud was on top of them i.e. they were fully surrounded with water from all sides. As soon as he Israelites crossed, God made the water return back and Pharaoh with his army drowned in the bottom of the sea.

In the above, we find a very strong symbol for baptism and how baptism saved us from the slavery of the devil: inside the water in the basin of baptism is our Lord crushing the devil

with His blood which He shed on the cross (just as Pharaoh died under the water). The Lord crushed the devil by the cross, with His blood He wipes away the sins of the baptised.

Another beautiful spiritual understanding from the ritual of baptism can be gained by understanding the reasons behind the place chosen for the baptism to take place in the Coptic Orthodox church. The baptism basin is always placed in the north-western corner of the church building with 2 doors, one western door leading to outside the church and another eastern door opening inside the church, leading towards the sanctuary. This is because the person coming to be baptised enters the church from outside through the western door with his/her back to the world outside (his/her old life). Between the 2 doors is the basin of baptism itself, inside the room – crossing the baptism he/she becomes a believer and gains a new nature in Christ and goes through the eastern door towards the sanctuary. This is exactly like the Israelites leaving Egypt, symbolising the person to be baptised leaving the world behind them, crossing the Red Sea (symbol to baptism), and becoming freed from Pharaoh (symbol of the devil), going towards the wilderness where God ordered Moses to build the tabernacle of God – a symbol of the church.

3. A symbol for the church building

After the Israelites settled in the desert out of Egypt, the first order from God to Moses was to build the tabernacle in the middle of their tents that God may dwell in their midst. If we read Exodus 25, 26 & 27, we find something really wonderful – how much God went into detail about everything in the tabernacle. He gave details about the materials, the fabrics, the rings of the curtains, the type and dimensions of the wooden poles that go through the curtains etc.

Someone may ask: why did God need to go into these fine details and talk about them in long chapters of the Holy Bible? The answer is that these details are full of meanings and symbols which God planned to lift up to a spiritual level in the New Testament. As I said previously, the New Testament is exactly like the Old Testament lifted up spiritually by the Holy Spirit.

From chapters 35 to 39 you will read about the tabernacle, its construction, dimensions and the way to consecrate it. It is the very first House of God. We notice in chapter 40, how much was the awe and reverence that overwhelmed Moses himself after he finished the consecration. This awe and reverence was to the extent that Moses himself could not enter the tabernacle as the cloud covered it and the glory of the Lord filled His house (Leviticus 40: 35).

4. Symbols for the priests' clothes and services

Going further to Exodus chapter 28 we encounter the special vestments and dress of the priesthood to be worn during services. And you find that God had given full details about the fabrics and different materials used in making the priesthood vestments that are very much similar to what is used in the church of the New Testament. As we examine this dress style we encounter a full range of symbols that remind us both of our Lord Jesus Christ and also of the true function of the priesthood in the New Testament Church. We can see the origins of what the priest and particularly the bishops (and notably the Patriarch) wear now. If you examine the dress you will notice how much the style of vestments tells us about the role of the Patriarch, bishops and priests in being our advocates and trying hard to prepare us for heaven.

5. Symbols for the rituals of ordaining a priest, consecrating an altar

In chapter 29 we notice the ordination of a priest which is just like we do now, also in chapter 30 we read of the consecration of an altar. In these chapters, and those following, we see the Lord giving exact instructions to Bezalel and others as to how exactly to make and fashion the items for worship and the tabernacle, from the colours to the materials to the styles, and so on.

Here I would like to say, if God Himself instituted these rituals, and He is ‘the same yesterday, today and forever, then why would He change these rituals or cancel those of the old in favour of the new?

C. Leviticus

Searching through the book of Leviticus, you find a lot of ritual practices and the way of worship in the house of God (the tabernacle), which is the church now. We will mention from them the following:

1. The first five chapters of Leviticus explain in detail the five sacrifices, which are for us an indication of the true life of a Christian who carries his life in the Lord from the altar in the Church to the altar in his home to the altar in his heart.
2. In chapter eight you will notice the consecration of a priest, just as we still do it.
3. In chapter nine are listed the offering for sacrifice and how they should be prepared and completed.
4. In chapter 10 are listed the punishments for doing wrong, which we still have in the Church. They also tell us how the priest should behave and act and how the Lord reacts to any wrong action.
5. In chapter 11 the Lord lists the animals, birds and fish which are accepted as clean animals for sacrifice and food. Often when people read this chapter, they simply list which animals are good for sacrifice and which are not. I should say that it took me seven weeks, with one hour per week, to explain what is the spiritual meaning of these animals, birds and fish is in our lives with Christ. I told the people that our Lord would never include in the Bible simple words that had no meaning or words that are simply for story-telling; so they were surprised just how long it took to explain the animals for sacrifice and the depth of the spiritual meaning which each carry for our lives in Christ.

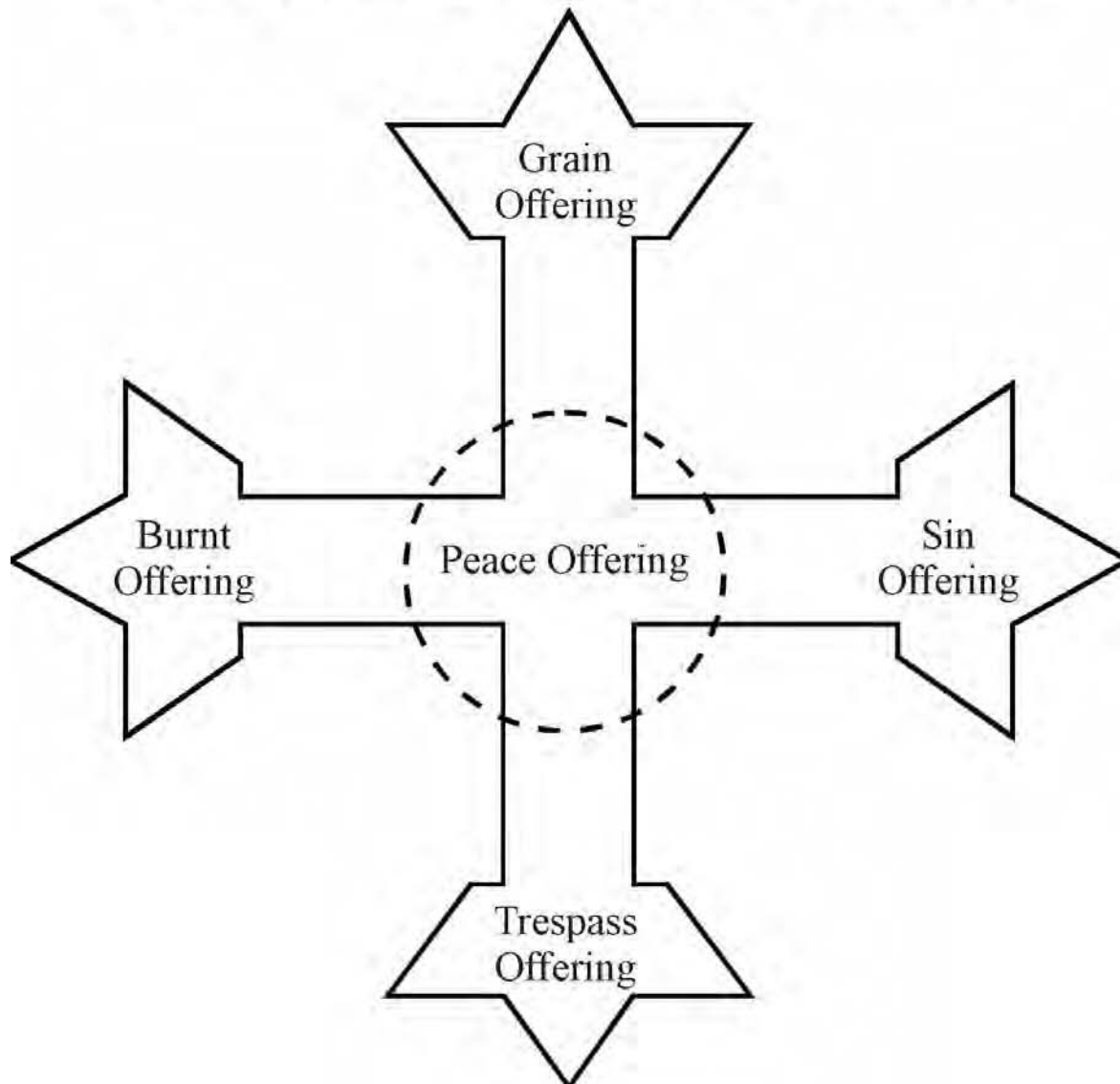
Finding the sacrifice of our Lord on the cross in the book of Leviticus

I would like now to highlight the first point mentioned above, and its relationship to the cross and how we can understand what the Lord fulfilled on our behalf by His cross.

The Lord fulfilled the 5 sacrifices mentioned in the first point in His Body on the cross. The following is a brief explanation. The 5 sacrifices were the sacrifice of burnt offering, the sacrifice of grain offering, the sacrifice of peace offering, the sacrifice of trespass, and the sacrifice of sin.

See diagram where sacrifices are drawn in the shape of a cross, connecting the 5 offerings fulfilled by the Lord on the cross.

Relationship between the five offerings (Sacrifices) of the Old Testament and the Cross of Our Lord



The sin offering is drawn on the left of the cross and the burnt offering on the right. As explained in the book of Leviticus, the Lord smells the burnt offering as a smell of pleasure and is happy with His people. Hence the cross transfers me from sin (left) to make me a cause of pleasure for my heavenly Father.

At the bottom of the cross is the trespass offering. The devil made all mankind trespass against God from the beginning, and on the cross the Lord crushed the devil under His feet and under the cross. This is also symbolised by the drawing showing the skull of Adam under the cross and the Lord's Blood coming down on it to wipe away the trespass that Adam did against God Himself. Only Christ's eternal sacrifice could achieve this.

At the top of the cross is the grain offering which symbolises The Lord's Body which He offered as a sacrifice on our behalf and gave us to eat His Flesh and Blood in Holy Communion for salvation in the form of bread and wine. By fulfilling these 4 sacrifices, and giving them to us in the form of His Body, we live in peace as St Paul said in Ephesians 4.

The Lord is our peace. The sacrifice of peace is drawn in the middle of the cross representing the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, Who is in the middle giving us peace. We can see that the rituals in the Old Testament are still valid and fulfilled in the Lord in a spiritual way that we can benefit from. In the New Testament, the Lord grants us His peace not through offering sacrifices in the morning and evening as the Levites did, but through repentance, confession and partaking of the Holy Communion.

D. Numbers

When we arrive at the book of Numbers, we learn about the journey of the people of Israel through the wilderness after leaving Egypt until the arrival in Canaan. This symbolically represents our lives as individuals and as the Church. Following baptism, which the Israelites experienced symbolically as they journeyed through the Red Sea, the story tells us how we should live in preparation for our lives in the true Promised land which is heaven. This journey tells us much about the activities of the devil and how we may answer him.

1. Another symbol of the cross in the book of Numbers

In 1 Corinthians 1: 18, St Paul says: "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God". This means that the word of the cross to the unbelievers is foolishness but for us the believers means the power of God with us because, without the cross there is no salvation to any one of us. There is no salvation for us unless during our sojourning in this earth we have the cross constantly in front of our eyes. St Paul said: "I have painted in front of you our Lord Jesus Christ and Him crucified". The Lord also said: if anyone wants to be my disciple, he/she should deny his/herself and carry the cross and follow me.

We note that Jacob before his departure in Egypt said blessings to eleven of his sons, and instead of Joseph, he blessed Joseph's sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. This is because later, in the time of Moses, God specified the tribe of the Levites to be His, leaving only 10 tribes (not counting Joseph and the Levites). By adding to them Joseph's sons, they become 12 again.

The Lord ordered the twelve tribes to travel through the desert *in the shape of the cross* (3 tribes on each side and the arc of the covenant which carries the manna in the middle. The manna here symbolises the Body of our Lord Jesus Christ which we receive in the church - the true Manna, the living Manna). And He said to them, whenever you journey, you journey in this form. In the middle, were the Levites blowing the trumpets loudly, which when sounded the tribes start moving in this order and when blown again, the tribes stop again in this order. If one could look down onto them from a plane, one would see a very big cross, made of about 2 million people moving the journey through the wilderness (our sojourning as strangers in the world) until they reach Canaan the land of promise (symbol to heavenly Jerusalem).

Sometimes I meet with churches from other denominations and I am the only one who does the sign of the cross! The cross is our life. The cross for those who do not believe is foolishness but for us it is the power of God with us.

2. God is always the same, God of orders and rituals in His worship

This book further tells us about God's characteristic of order and not of confusion. So this book, and the whole of the Bible, explains how God has put an order for His Church; priesthood, the diaconate (deacon-ship) and the laity (the congregation). In such a way, God

has ordered that those of one group should not interfere with another. During the time of the Book of Numbers, God would act immediately to stop wrongdoing – there was an incident where three men, Abiram, Dathan and Korah wanted to raise themselves from their level of deacon-ship to that of the priesthood (they were jealous of Moses and Aaron). So they created a big scene. In an instant God opened the mouth of the earth and swallowed them together with their followers. 250 people were swallowed up.

God was so specific about roles in His house, so our church is also very specific about the roles of her patriarch, bishop, priest, deacon and so on. We never allow anyone to jump his role. You find that God does the same and is very specific about things to be done in a certain way and any mistake made, He used to punish on the spot. This is the importance of the rituals. For instance the book of Leviticus tells us “Then Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it, put incense on it, and offered profane fire before the Lord, which He had not commanded them. So fire went out from the Lord and devoured them, and they died before the Lord.” (Leviticus 10: 1,2). So as we can see, because Nadab and Abihu, the first 2 sons of Aaron the high priest, who worked in the altar in the house of the Lord, did their services in the wrong way, immediately fire came from the altar and burned them in a moment. We are more lenient now in the church, but God stores for everyone the wages of their deeds.

On another occasion one of the Israelites committed a sin and entered the house of the Lord, so a priest took a spear and killed him and God agreed because the priest had a zeal for the house of God and took revenge for the Holiness of God. Nowadays we do not do this but we try to teach people to respect the altar.

Another example was when king David was returning the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem after being absent for a long time. The Ark was carried on a carriage with 2 oxen. Uzzah “put out his hand to the ark of God and took hold of it, for the oxen stumbled. Then the anger of the Lord was aroused against Uzzah, and God struck him there for his error; and he died there by the ark of God” (2 Samuel 6: 6, 7). Uzzah was worried the ark may fall so just for a minute he supported it. However, this was against God’s command, as he was not allowed to touch the Ark because he was not a priest (He was a Levite assisting the priest). Therefore, immediately God killed him. Even David became very upset that God did so, but God ordered things to be this way, so they had to happen this way. Now in this century people cancel rituals, and follow no orders or practices. If God Himself wants those rituals and in the above examples has made sure they are perfectly kept, how can we dare cancel the rituals that God has ordered?

Fasting

An examination of the Old Testament informs us everything about fasting: the periods of fasting, the reasons for fasting, about public and private fasting, and even which foods to eat whilst fasting. God tells us about boiled beans, and the right seeds to be eaten in Ezekiel 4:9-11. In this passage we are given the correct foods for fasting, and we should note that there are no meat or dairy products! We should also remember the young men in the Book of Daniel who were taken to Babylon and offered all that was on the king’s table. They refused, and stated that they were fasting and not eating meat. The Lord rewarded them for their steadfastness and gave them a better appearance than all those who ate from the king’s table.

Another point is that fasting was the very first commandment ever from God to mankind. The first sin of the whole world was a sin of breaking fasting. God said to Adam you have all

these trees with all their fruits to eat of, but do not eat from this one tree in the middle of the garden, isn't this fasting? Eat this and don't eat that. The first sin was breaking this order of fasting.

These are just a few selections from the Old Testament. It requires a great deal of time to analyse the Books in detail and to find all of the references to our rituals which are contained therein, particularly if we are looking for the theology, spirituality, applicability to the individual's life and also the strength of Church tradition. This is the process which we should undergo if we are aiming to cross the seas of this world and to arrive in the Heavenly Jerusalem and the True Canaan.

In answer to those who level criticisms at the Church that it is a Church of the Old Testament, etc, we should always remember that God is unchangeable and that those commands which He gave us in depth in the Old Testament are to be observed now in their spiritual depth. It is simply not feasible that God would have made such commands, in the most minute detail, and punish with severity those who transgressed these commands, and then all of a sudden completely change His mind and cancel them.

The New Testament

A. Gospels and Acts

It is very clear from a reading of the Gospels that our Lord Jesus Christ perfected all of the rituals of the Old Testament in Himself. He fulfilled them all, He submitted to them all and He fully respected the priesthood even though He, being God, knew of the corruption of the priesthood at the time. Nevertheless, He still gave them respect, a pure respect, given their office as priests. He showed respect even when He needed to confront them with their mistakes and to show their errors strongly. We should remember that when He cured the man born with leprosy, He told him to go and show himself to the priest and offer the due offering which was required from anyone who was healed of leprosy, which he should offer to be declared by the priest that he is cleansed and healed.

He also told the people that they should look with respect at the priests who sit on the thrones of Moses and Aaron, and to listen to their teachings. Nevertheless He did say that the people should not look at their deeds or actions, even though they may be corrupt, the people should learn from them.

We notice, too, that our Lord Jesus Christ is a God of order just as we noticed in the Old Testament. When, after the Sermon on the Mount, He miraculously blessed the five loaves and two fish, and then again later when He blessed the seven loaves and a few fish in the second miracle of multiplication, He said for the people to sit in groups of 50. This was, of course, of little importance to our Lord personally, but He is a God of Order, everything here has meaning – even the number 4000 and 5000 have meanings which can touch our lives.

Even when our Lord rose from the dead, every detail has a spiritual significance and tells us about the order He requires of His creation. When the two Apostles, St. John and St. Peter, rushed to the tomb after St. Mary Magdalene had told them that she had met the Risen Lord, they found the tomb empty. We would expect that the risen Lord would have left the shroud and cloths lying where they had fallen, but no. Instead they found that the cloths were folded neatly and in place. Our God is a God of order.

He appeared to His disciples for the 40 days following His Resurrection and the Book of Acts tells us that these appearances were made to teach the Apostles and disciples all they needed to know about the arrangements of the Church and of the Kingdom of Heaven.

The same is true with regard to the conversion of St. Paul. The Lord appeared to Saul who later became St Paul the apostle, He caused him to be blind. Saul was shocked and terrified and in great fear asked “what do You want me to do Lord?”. The Lord may have said go and preach my name; but this did not happen. The Lord said to him go to Ananias the apostle in Damascus and he will tell you what to do. We notice here that as the Lord has appointed the apostles, He left the full authority for them to direct St Paul. Ananias the apostle baptised St Paul and instructed him. St Paul spent three years in the desert with the Lord Jesus Christ and when he was ready to serve the Lord sent him to the apostles in Jerusalem and he met with those whom he called the pillars of the apostles (James, Peter and John). St Paul as he mentioned in his epistle, showed them the gospel he was going to preach (basically explained to them his faith and what his knowledge was) and they gave him the right hand of the ministry. This act is equal to the ordination and the appointment of the bishop, priest and different clerical levels.

Another example of our Lord’s emphasis on order is to be found in the story of the raising of Lazarus from the dead. Our Lord asked people to roll away the stone from the tomb and then He ordered Lazarus to arise from the dead. Then He asked His disciples to loose him from the burial coverings. This last point has great significance; what does death result from? Death is the result of sin which we allow to conquer us and through that we are under the rule of Satan the devil. So if sin is the cause of our death, then it is symbolised by the burial coverings that were tying Lazarus in the tomb. And who can remove these ties, but the Lord Himself? It is He who is able to forgive our sins and who is able to raise us up from the death caused by sin. He can untie me; absolve me. This power he also gave to the Apostles that they might loosen the ties of sin which bind us. We repeat this statement in the Absolution, after every Confession, at the end of vespers and during the Holy Mass: ‘You Oh Lord gave authority to the Apostles, to bind and unbind the chains of injustice on the earth...’. The priest himself had no personal authority to forgive sin or to raise the dead, but his power comes solely from God. Just as the Lord raised Lazarus and gave him a new life unfettered by the bonds which held him captive to death, so too the priest, being authorised by the Lord Jesus Christ, can loosen the bonds of sin and set the captive of sin free and allow him or her to practice a renewed life once more. And this takes place at the end of an honest confession with repentance.

B. Epistles

When we read the letters of St. Paul the Apostle, particularly his letters to the Corinthians, we notice that he has written down the rituals of the Church to be followed. In the epistles we see how St. Paul used his priestly authority to bind and unbind, to absolve and deny absolution. In the first letter he expels a sinner from the Church community for a full year and in his second letter he relies on his authority as an Apostle to allow the sinner back into the fold so that he might not be consumed or swallowed by the devil; this is an absolution.

There are those who deny priestly authority and say that if we choose to confess, then we should do it straight to God alone, not with the agency of the priesthood, forget that God made it very clear that he wished it to be so. Some people will then say ‘Get us obvious

verses'; the verses are there for those who choose to study the Scriptures with understanding and not simply learn them by rote (as proof texts) or simply read them superficially.

St. Paul also mentioned in this letter about how he expected the Church order to be conducted in services and the like. He noted that women should cover their heads in the Church and this practice we have not changed. Many Churches have forgotten this practice, but it is Biblical so why should it be dismissed? St. Paul, in the same letter, said that he did not like men to wear their hair long as women do – this too we teach. Also we do not allow women to raise their voices in the Church, even if a woman want to ask something; we suggest that a woman remains quiet and asks her husband when she returns home, or ask someone in authority away from the service itself.

St. Paul praised the Corinthians for their order in services; he said that everything should be kept in its place and ordered. In the English texts of the bible it uses the word 'discipline', but a better word is the original 'tuxus' which means order or rituals. In 1 Thessalonians he made warnings against those who walk to act without order (1 Thessalonians 5:14); in 2 Thessalonians 3:6-7, after his first warning, he suggested that he faithful should avoid any brother who walks or acts without order. Indeed he wrote to the disciple of the Church there in the same order as St. Paul had delivered unto him and also to ordain priests for them (here is an ordination in the New Testament).

If we read the Book of Revelation we notice a very thorough set of order, movements and writings. The same is true for Isaiah's vision of heaven which itself is very ordered and calm, everything done step by step and with ordered explanations for everything. This reminds us of the passage in Genesis 28 when Jacob was fleeing from before the face of his brother Esau and after he slept overnight in the wilderness on a stone and had himself an appearance of the Lord, he arose in the morning and poured some oil over the stone and declared how sacred the place was and would remain. This is the same ritual which we employ today and when we need to consecrate an altar; we pour oil and we pray.

I will give here some references to read which clearly tell that God teaches us orders, rites and rituals. They may be translated in the wrong way in the English Bible. But in them all we notice that St Paul is giving clear instructions about order and rituals to be practised. Even more than this, St Paul said "any brother who does not follow this order stop him".

The references are:

1 Cor 14: 26-40

Col 2: 5

1 Thess 5: 14

2 Thess 3: 6, 7, 11

Ritual Theology

Note: you might notice in the English translation using the word “elders” instead of priests, which is the order they use in the protestant and Anglican church, while the origin of the word is priest.

Conclusion

These very few examples prove the Biblical origin of all of the rituals practised within the Holy Church so that we shall each be ready and able to offer an explanation to anyone who questions us about rituals which we use in the practice of the Church. It is also worth mentioning that the Coptic Orthodox Church is perhaps the Church truest to the model of ritual life which is portrayed for us in the Scriptures. Our Church is distinguished in many rituals and I might dare to say that it is the most loyal to the Biblical tradition.

RITUAL THEOLOGY I

SECTION THREE

In the previous sections we had an introduction about the sources for ritual theology and the proofs from the Holy Bible about the importance of the rituals in the worship of God. Rituals are not something originating from the Old Testament only, they were continued in the New Testament and the church life.

In this section we will start talking about the body of the course itself. We will start with divisions of ritual theology, or as we spoke before, finding theology in the rituals practiced in the church.

The subject of ritual theology is divided into three main sections: -

1. *Historical basis*
2. *Theoretical or systematic basis*
3. *Practical basis*

Historical

This follows up the history of an individual or particular ritual of those practised in the Holy Church. In it we are tracking that ritual, when and how it started, and the stages it has gone through until it settled on what we practice in the Church today. However, we have to emphasise the fact that all these rituals originated from what God ordered in the Old Testament, which was continued in the New Testament, but with spiritual practices and understanding.

Example: Baptism

In the apostles time, the church was at her beginning, there were no churches built etc... so baptism took place in rivers or lakes in an open place that is available. Then eventually by building churches they started to build a basin for baptism.

The apostles had the authority from the Lord so that by laying their hands on the person baptised or a substance, they give the Holy Spirit or call on the Holy Spirit to work in the substance or place or person. They were aware that their time will not continue more than few years and they will be martyred or departed. Hence, they made the Holy oil of Myron (or the oil of christening used in the sacrament of confirmation, or the Holy Chrism), so that when used to anoint by the bishop or priest it does the same work as the laying of the hands of the apostles.

After St Peter's sermon which touched the hearts of many (3000), the apostles first prayed on the water to be consecrated and through their prayer and apostolic authority the Holy Spirit came upon the water at that instant, and then they baptised the people and by laying their hands on the baptised people they received the Holy Spirit. Then the apostles prayed another prayer on the water so that it went back to its previous state.

After the apostolic time, it was the case of building the church and the baptismal font, then the bishop puts the Holy oil of Chrism that the apostles gave to the church and by this blessing, the baptistery is consecrated and ready to be used.

During a baptism, through the prayer of the bishop or the priest on the water the Holy Spirit comes on the water to consecrate it and make it ready for the person to be baptized in it.

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At the end of the baptism, with another prayer of the priest or the bishop the water returns to its original state and is drained into a certain container underground, with holes around its side that the water goes directly to the bottom underground and not in the sewerage.

If you read the Gospel of St John Chapter 5 when the Lord went to the pool of “Bethesda” and there was a man who had been lying there for 38 years with infirmity. The Lord said to him “do you want to be made well”, he said “yes Sir but I have no- one to put me into the pool”, as an angel came once a year to stir the water, and the first one who comes into the water is healed from the disease he had, then the water turns to its origin. The angel is a symbol to the bishop or the priest of the church as in the book of Revelations the Lord spoke a message to “the angel of the church”, like the Angel of the church of Smyrna and so on.

By the prayers of the priest the water is changed by the Holy Spirit, and after the priest finishes and prays again the water comes normal as when the angel stirred the water and the first one in, was healed. In the Old Testament sickness was punishment for sin and being healed was forgiveness from sin. And you know that the Lord always for every person presented to him used to say firstly your sins are forgiven. Then take your bed and go. And when the disciples saw the blind man who was born blind with the Lord, they said to Him, Who has sinned him or his parents that he was born blind.

This is just to give you some understanding of the rituals in the Bible as they are hidden like a treasure.

The above is an example of what is meant by historical view of the subject which talks about our rituals, how they started and developed to what they are now and why; and the biblical and theological understanding of it as I explained in this example of baptism.

Theoretical

States the theories or the principles of the Church, the main target of Christianity, the architectural theories of building the Church, inside and out, different parts of the Church items and objects used in the Church and why. (Why is it built like this and not that, the vestments of the priest and deacons, the different ranks, the covering and veils used, the different substances used (oils, incense, candles etc...), the different vessels used (e.g. censor, oil lamp etc...) we refer to history, theology, tradition, Bible and Spirituality to explain why).

Practical

The practical side of that subject. It deals with the details of how to practice every section of a sacrament or service in the church. You notice a lot of movement for the priest and for the deacons. A person who recently joined the church, standing among the congregation in the church, will notice practices of bowing down at different times, and other events. This is what will be explained in this section (as much as time allows us). The explanation will cover two sides:

A. Details of the rituals, what are they?

B. The grounds for these rituals - spiritual, biblical, dogmatic, theological and traditional grounds of these practices (are they just some movements to be practised during the prayer, to show off, or are they grounded and based on the Bible and spiritual understandings and meanings. This sub-section also gives the reason for the order of prayers, order of the mass, order of the praises, order of the Holy Passion week, order of the Pentecost, the 50 days, the great holy fast etc

Ritual Theology

This can be a very long section, as it talks about the whole church life. To be honest with you, not many people in the church, in general, know all these details. This course should be at least 2 or 3 courses if not 4, but we will explain as much as the scope of this course allows us.

We will try here to understand some main items that we see every week in the church, for you to understand it and to know what it is all about. And we will also study the church as a building in another section - then we will see if we have enough time to deal with the historical part.

To study the practical side, we will firstly study the different types or orders of the church rituals that are practiced in the church life and what do they mean. We will divide them into 4 main subsections:

- a) daily rituals
- b) the periodical/occasional rituals
- c) rituals of different services needed for the believers
- d) celebratory rituals

a) Daily rituals

Mainly concerns the rituals that are practised every day in the life of the Church (the general public Church where the congregation meet to worship the Lord, the small unit of the Church ie. my home and the smallest unit of the Church ie. myself as a believer and as a member of the Body of Christ). This includes the daily rituals eg. The “Agpia” (book of prayers of the hours – containing selections of psalms and the gospels) and the praises which are performed in my own life and the Church, the raising of incense (which can sometimes be prayed without a Mass), and the most important of all the Holy Mass, which the Holy Fathers said could be practised every day, as is the habit in the monasteries. The daily rituals apply for the whole church being the Body of Christ our Lord, concerning the liturgical life of the church for the congregation. It also applies on the individual being a member of the church or a member of the Body of Christ our Lord. Here it includes the person’s practice of the daily spiritual life according to the guidance of his/her confession father, and this applies to the individuals whether of the clergy or laymen.

b) The Periodical/Occasional rituals

These study the rituals of the service that are practised only once or very occasionally throughout the year and which fall at exact times throughout the year.

Eg. The rituals of the Lordly Feasts (7 great and 7 small and two other feasts which are ritually like Lordly Feasts), the rituals of the month of “Koiak”, the rituals of the Holy Great Fasting, the 3 masses of the water (El-Lakan) which comes in Epiphany, the Great Thursday of covenant and the Apostles feast.

c) The rituals of different services needed for the believers.

The service of the rituals conducted according to the needs of the Congregation, (conducted when only needed). This includes 5 of the sacraments – Baptism, Confirmation, Repentance, Confession, unction of the sick, marriage and the blessing of homes. There is even a ritual prayer called “Abo Tarbo” for the person bitten by a rabid dog (a dog which has rabies), which you may have not heard about before. It was used frequently in Egypt in the old times and is sometimes used in our days. If a wild dog bites someone it might kill him and this is a special prayer to help that person (it is found in the books of the church). We mention this to demonstrate how the church, being a mother (and that why I like to refer to the church as “her” and not “it”) caters for all the needs of her children. The church to us is not the building, it is the intellectual, logical and internal service offered by her servants, to satisfy all the needs of her children the believers. In the praises before the evening incense raising, there are

sections of praise arranged on the sections of the Saturday “Theotoki”, in one of them there is a verse which says “the church is a mother, her vessels are always full, her children are thirty and hungry but she always feeds them and satisfies them”. When you hear this and hear that even when a wild dog bites someone, (which is very common in Egypt, in the old times and even now in some villages in upper Egypt) the church cares for and helps him/her, you feel that the church is a real mother caring for everything. Moreover, in the mass we even pray for the vegetation, plants, for rain, for the rivers, for the winds, for someone travelling, for everything... The church is like a mother looking after all the needs of her children.

d) Celebratory rituals

These are special rituals concerning the general Church as a whole; used for the service and order of the Church running and hierarchy. This is performed according to the need, it is usually an additional celebration with several rites that are added at certain times during the Holy Mass, eg. Ordination of Patriarchs, Bishops, priests, deacons, consecrating churches, altars, preparing and consecrating the holy “Myron” etc.

Note: what you see nowadays during consecration of the church when the Bishop or Pope comes is only consecrating the altar and icons painted on wood or on the wall. This takes 1.5 hours. Consecrating a church takes 7 hours. When this happens no one can enter the church with shoes, and in certain occasions women cannot enter the Church at all. This is what happens in the monasteries. We will not be able to explain the details of these rituals in this course.

The Ritual books used in the Church

The ritual books of the church fall under 6 groups; all are in the same level of importance and are used in the rites of the Church the whole year through. The first five groups should necessarily be available in every Church. The 6th group is only kept in the Patriarchate Library, and some of the books of the 6th group exist with the Bishops for certain uses in the parishes (but not all of them).

1. Divine books
2. Books to serve at the altar
3. Books of public reading to address the congregation
4. Books of praises
5. Books of celebratory services
6. Books of general Church service and order (this is a special group to be kept in the Patriarchate library only, and some of them are also kept with the Bishops of the Church).

1. The Divine Books

The word “divine” gives the impression that these books are directly from God, like the Holy Bible. They are continuously used in the church life and in the personal life of the individual believers (e.g. at home).

- a) These are both Testaments of the Holy Bible, used in the meetings, Sunday School meetings, the services of the Church;
- b) The book of the “Agpia” which means “the prayers of the hours”. Its main frame is the psalms and sections from the Gospels plus some added prayers (91% is from the Holy Bible, it is divine);
- c) The book containing the 151 Psalms, used in the 1st procession of the overnight watch of “Apocalypsis” (the joyous Saturday overnight watch), it is wrapped in a white veil and carried by the priest in a procession around the whole Church at the beginning of the overnight watch prayers.

2. The Books for service at the altar

Mainly the books which concern the Holy Mass, the Holy offering (the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ). This group includes:

- a) Holy Liturgy (of St. Basil, St. Gregory and St. Cyril). There are other Masses like the Mass of St. John the Beloved and St. James (added to the book containing the liturgies of Saints Basil, Gregory, Cyril are the anaphora of St. John the Beloved and St. James etc). There was a book of secret prayers, which was kept aside on the altar for the Priest, but is now included in the book of the Holy Liturgy.
- b) The book of the services of the deacons containing all the different responses by the deacons who serve inside the sanctuary in different occasions. It also contains all the hymns prayed by the congregation (led by the deacons who serve outside the sanctuary) in all occasions and feasts.
- c) The book of praises before incense raising and during the Holy Communion time. And other praises which some people call songs, however I don't like to use this word, in the church life they are called "praises" (in Arabic "Tarateel". These praises are different from hymns which are called "El-Alhann". They are like verses of poetry that rime). This book contains praises sometimes used during the praises before the incense raising "vespers" or in the early morning incense raising and the praises at the end of the mass during the Holy Communion. It is a big book that covers the whole year.

3. Books of public reading to address the congregation

Some are used during the Holy Mass, others are used at different times.

- a) The different "Katameroses" (meaning explained later) which cover the readings of all the Masses all over the whole year and the passion week.
- b) The "Synaxarium" – tells the biography of the saint of each day of the Coptic Year and any important events in the history of the church that occurred on that day. According to the rituals of the church, it is NOT read in Passion Week, the 50 days after the Resurrection and the 7 great Lordly feasts.
- c) The "Difnar" – is a book that throws some light (without details) on the life of the Saint or the church event celebrated on that day, with a glorification. It is used at the end of each day's midnight praises (at the conclusion of "Theotoki"). The "Difnar" is replaced by a special commentary for : the Sundays of the Holy Great Fasting, Sundays of the 50 days after the Resurrection, all of the Great Lordly feasts and some of the small Lordly feasts, and the feasts of St. Mary.
- d) The Book of "Mayamer" – this is hardly used, it is a sort of contemplation of one of the Fathers in a certain occasion, and mainly used for the 3 great Lordly feasts and some of the small ones, and also on some of the days of the Passion week (But this is very rarely used).
- e) The book of sermons of the Holy Fathers eg. St Athanasius the apostolic, St. John Chrysostom, St. Shenouti the Archmandrite and other fathers. Some of these sermons are read in Passion Week and on other occasions.
- f) The books of explanation or commentaries (for some feasts or events of the year). Eg. after the Gospel in Epiphany, at the end of every hour in Passion week, and after the feast of the Great Resurrection.

4. Books of praises

The first is called the “**Psalmodeia**” from the word “**Psalmos**” which is like the English word Psalm (this is the origin of the word which means prayers chanted in verses). Some of them are taken from the psalms of the prophet David and some of them from the Fathers of the church.

There are two main books of “**Psalmodeias**” to serve over the whole year (the yearly “**psalmodeia**” and the “**psalmodeia**” for the month “**Koiak**” which covers the 4 weeks before the feast of the birth of Christ).

- a) The second group of books, are the books of “**Epsalies**”. These are special books for additional sections to be added in the praises for special occasions like the feast of the birth of Christ, the feast of baptism of Christ, the holy great fasting, Palm Sunday, the feast of the cross, the feast of the resurrection and the feasts of saints and martyrs. These added sections, are called “**Epsalies**”, which means chanting in poetry to Praise Our Lord Jesus Christ or in exalting St Mary or one of the saints (from the original Coptic word “**Epsalia**”).

There is a special book for the preparation day of the birth of Christ and the day itself, and for the preparation day for Epiphany and the day itself.

There is a book for the “**Epsalies**” of the Holy Great Lent and its commentaries and it also contains the order and the readings of the procession of the Holy Cross. (There are 3 processions of the Holy Cross, and they should all be conducted during the early raising of incense).

The book of “**Epsalies**” of feasts and saints. It basically gives 2 or more “**Epsalies**” for every single feast and for many of the saints.

- b) The book of Spiritual praises that are used at the end of the mass, glorifications etc.
- c) The books for different church services needed by the believers and the books of glorifications for angels and saints.
- d) The book that includes the prayers of these 4 sacraments: Baptism (this includes the prayer for the water; prayer for the woman; prayer for the catechumen; the prayer for the washing of the child after 7 days (from birth); and the commandments to be read on the godparents), Confirmation, Unction of the sick, engagement and the different Marriage prayers (for first marriages and second marriages which are due to death or divorce), prayer for “**Abo Tarbo**”, and the different prayers for funerals.
- e) The book for Glorification of St. Mary, Angels and Saints
- f) The book of blessing new homes and properties.
- g) The books kept in the Patriarchate Library, only a few of them are kept with the Bishops. These are:
- h) The book of consecrations which contains the rituals for: laying foundation stones for new churches and consecration of altars, the book of consecration for the whole church building from inside, the book for consecrating the vessels used for the mass, the icons, and ordaining priests and deacons in all their ranks (this book is also kept with all the Bishops)

- ii) The book of ordination of monks and nuns – the Bishop will only have this if there is a monastery in his parish (also in monasteries and convents).
- iii) Both of these books should be in the Patriarchate library and added to them are;
- iv) The book for ordaining Patriarchs, Enthronement of the Patriarch (if a Patriarch is chosen from amongst the monks he will be ordained a Patriarch, but if he was a bishop before, it will be a prayer of Enthronement only), and for ordaining Bishops and Metropolitans
- v) The book for consecrating Churches
- vi) The book for consecrating Altars
- vii) The book for the Holy Chrism/Myron (prayers during preparing the Myron oil).

Different types of ‘Katameroses’ used in the church

Now, we will go to the third group of these six groups of books. The main book in this group is the book we call in Coptic “Katameroc” which is simply in English the “portion” of readings allotted to each day. “Katameroc” is equal to the Greek word in Coptic letters “Kathyn-mermin”. Some letters in the origin Greek will be different. “Kata” means “according to” & “meroc” means “the portion or what belongs to”. So katameros means “according to what belong to everyday” or originally if you hear the word “kata eheo meros” it means what belongs to that day’s readings or according to that day what are the readings. People usually say “katamaros” as they used to hear it but the right pronunciation is “katameros”.

This book includes the readings of the vespers, matins and mass (Pauline Epistles, Catholic Epistle, reading of the Acts which we call “Epraxis” (from the Greek word “Eprax” which means a story) and readings of the main Psalm and Gospel of the mass.

To understand why the church chose specific readings for specific days we require a long detailed study. The church arranged the readings for the whole year in a frame, inspired by the Holy Spirit in an amazing way, to go in two lines, vertical and horizontal, and it covers in a round frame the event of the day, and a target of a period e.g. the Great Holy Fasting, the 50 days of joy after the resurrection, the period of St Mary Fasting and so on. It is really amazing to understand, but for now we’ll at least gain an idea about the book of “katameros”. There are several different books of “katameros” used in the church:

1. “Katameros” of Sundays
2. “Katameros” of days
3. “Katameros” of Holy great fasting
4. “Katameros” of Passion Week
5. “Katameros” of Holy Joyous 50 days

These are the main “katameroses”, which we use according to the time of the year they cover. All of them provide 6 main readings for every single Mass or Liturgy, three of them are comprised of 2 sections. What does this mean? The basic ground for the “katameros” is to provide reading of Vespers, Matins and the Mass. The readings in part are as follow:

- 1) Vespers has selected verses from one or more psalms and a Gospel
- 2) Matins has selected verses from psalms and a Gospel
- 3) Main Mass has
 - a) Pauline, which is part of one of St Paul’s 14 epistles.
 - b) Catholicon e.g. one of the universal letters, the letter of St James, St Peter, St John and St Jude.

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- c) Acts part of the book of Acts, which has the story of the 12 Apostles, called “Epraxis”. The word “Eprax” means story
- d) The main Psalm and Gospel of the Mass.

The “Katameros” of the Holy Great Fasting is quite different from the others. It adds some other readings from the Old Testament in a certain order, which we will talk about later. It still provides the same six sections like the other “katameros” plus additional readings. The order of readings for the fast of Nineveh is the same as that of the holy great fasting. Although Jonah fasted 3 days in the belly of the Great Fish, it was not voluntary, he was forced. However, the people of Nineveh fasted willingly for repentance and forgiveness of sins, and God forgave them. For this reason the fast is preferably called the fast of Nineveh (instead of the fast of Jonah).

We will return to the 5 books of “katameros” mentioned above.

- No 1 and No 2 are the most used books in the church life over the whole year
- No 3 is used only in 58 days of the year
- No 4 is used only in 6 days of the year
- No 5 is used only in 50 days of the year

So No. 3,4,5 are used in 115 days of the year, and the other 250 days are covered by the other 2 books.

The “katameros” of the days provides the readings of all the days, the 250 days that are not covered by No. 3,4,5 except Sundays. Because we do not know in which day of the month Sunday will come, there is “katameros” of Sundays (No.1) which covers only Sundays. It covers some of the feasts but not all. This book employs a system called “borrowing”, where readings of other days are borrowed, so that they match the event celebrated that day e.g. Ecumenical council, feast of St Mary, feast of Archangel Michael and other archangels, feast of the martyrs etc... For example, for the feasts of the apostles, the church selected readings that match with the lives of the apostles and repeats them every time we have a feast of a disciple or an apostle. The same for feasts of the archangels etc...

This is the system of borrowing the readings. But the Lordly feasts are special, each one has its own readings included in the yearly day “katameros” except for resurrection, Pentecost, Palm Sunday and the Great Thursday. While the book of Sundays covers all the Sundays of the year, except the period of the Holy Great Fasting, the Passion Week and the Holy Joyous 50 days. These three occasions move from year to year according to the Jewish Passover because we always feast of the resurrection of the Lord the Sunday following the Jewish Passover according to what happened in the days of the Lord Himself. The Jewish Passover changes from one year to the other depending on the moon of the month.

The period of the holy great fasting, the Passion Week and the fifty joyous days after the resurrection, always comes in the period of the months ‘Baramhat’, ‘Baramouda’ and half of the month ‘Amshir’. So we will find the Katameros of Sunday covering all the Coptic year *except* this period, which is skipped, because the church does not repeat the event in different books.

The Sundays’ readings have been put in order in a certain way, horizontal and vertical to cover how the Lord saved me in an amazing order. But it is too much to be covered in such a course. It is very deep to understand how the Holy Spirit guided the fathers to select all these readings with such deep meanings.

Detailed explanation about the “katameros” of the Holy Great Fasting and Passion Week

In the Holy Great fasting, I prefer this name rather than the lent. We will divide the readings of the Holy Great fasting into two main sections:

1. Saturdays and Sundays
2. Days from Monday to Friday plus the 3 days of fasting of the people of Nineveh and their repentance.

By the way those three days of the Nineveh was not in the church life from the beginning, they were added in the middle, one of the Patriarchs was from Assyrian origin used to fast those 3 days and did not fast the 7 days preparation before the 40 days, so it was a bit of disagreement between the Patriarch on one side, and the bishops and the other congregation on the other side. So they have come to a resolution that the church will fast the three days of Nineveh and he fasts the 7 days of the preparation, this how it is started around the third century.

The three days of the fasting of the Nineveh and their rituals are practiced the same as the 40 days of the Holy Great fasting. This based on that the Lord fasted the 40 days abstaining from food and drink and also the people of Nineveh fasted for three days without food or drink, that's why the church considered them at the same level like the Holy Great fasting.

As we are talking about the period of the holy great fasting, also the hymns and all sections of the praises before vespers and the midnight praises are different on Saturdays and Sundays from the ones used from Monday to Friday in the great holy fasting. Also the three days of Nineveh are the same tunes like the praises from Monday to Friday. This is just very brief and will be detailed in the section for hymns.

Returning to the books of the readings in the Holy Great fasting, we do not pray the evening incense raising or vespers except Saturday only. But from Monday to Friday if we have a mass every day, we will not have vespers. On Sunday evening, we have something called “the Sunday evening service”. In it, there is thanksgiving prayer, a reading of the Gospel and a commentary. Sadly, this is hardly practised lately, but at least you now know how the early church was.

The reason why we do not have evening incense raising or vespers from Monday to Friday during the holy great fasting, is that the abstaining from food and drink on those days should continue until 5 pm, and the holy masses should end by the same time. The origin from the Jewish system is that the new day of the church life starts from the sunset of the day before. Hence, finishing the mass at 5 pm is very close to the beginning of the new day, which means we cannot pray vespers. That is why you notice that in the masses of those days of the fasting we pray the “Agpia” prayers till the 12th hour. From this explanation, you will find another difference in the “Katameros” of the holy great fasting, that there is no readings for vespers of the masses from Monday to Friday.

Another difference in the “Katameros” of the holy great fasting is that before the gospel of the morning incense raising there are some prophecies and sections of the Old Testament added, which differ in their number and length from day to another. This involves some special rituals which are not practised in the normal early morning incense raising for the normal days of the year.

Another thing we have to know that the period of the Holy Great fasting and the 50 days after the resurrection and before the Pentecost is divided into weeks e.g. the first week, second week, third week etc... Always the Sunday comes after the days (e.g. we'll be having Monday of the

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first week till the Saturday of the first week, then we have the first Sunday, and so on...) So always the days precedes Sunday in the same week, because Sunday crowns the week or collects the week.

We find also something amazing about how the readings in the “Katameros” of the Holy Great Fasting have been selected and put together. The readings form a complete theme going on steps from week to another. We find that every single week is centred around a target which is part of the main theme of the whole fasting period. The target of each week is highlighted in the readings of the Sunday. Deeply understanding it, you find that the readings of the Sunday for each week is the centre of the week and also crowns its readings with highlighting the target of that week. The targets of the seven weeks of the holy great fasting go along in steps from first week to the last fulfilling the theme of the whole fasting period. By this you feel that the Holy Spirit has guided the fathers in selecting those readings to be like a spiritual trip taking the believer from the first Sunday to the end, stepping up gradually until the conclusion of the holy fasting fulfilling the spiritual theme targeted; and amazingly you find that the spiritual meanings of the palm Sunday and the Sunday of the Holy Resurrection perfects the spiritual understanding of the theme fulfilled in the period of the holy great fasting.

The readings included in the Katameros of the Holy Great Fasting

Readings of Sundays	Readings of Saturdays	Readings of the days from Monday to Friday & also the three days of Ninevah	Readings of the Feast of Jonah
<p>For every Sunday the Katameros contains the following readings:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Psalm and Gospel for Vespers 2. Psalm and Gospel for Early Morning Incense Raising 3. Pauline Epistle 4. Catholicon Epistle 5. The Acts 6. Psalm and Gospel of the Holy Mass 7. Psalm and Gospel of the Evening of the Sunday 	<p>The readings for Saturdays include the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Prophecies for early morning (not usually read) 2. Psalm and Gospel for Early Morning Incense Raising 3. Pauline Epistle 4. Catholicon Epistle 5. The Acts 6. Psalm and Gospel of the Holy Mass <p>Note: The last Saturday of the Great Fasting is Lazarus Saturday which</p>	<p>For every mass of these days the readings include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Prophecies for early morning 2. Psalm and Gospel for Early Morning Incense 3. Pauline Epistle 4. Catholicon Epistle 5. The Acts 6. Psalm and Gospel of the Holy Mass <p>Note: There is no readings for Vespers as they are not prayed in the days of the Great Fasting.</p>	<p>The readings for the mass of Jonah’s Feast include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Psalm and Gospel for Early Morning Incense Raising (there is no Vespers) 2. Pauline Epistle 3. Catholicon Epistle 4. The Acts 5. Psalm and Gospel for the Holy Mass <p>Note: Its hymns and order follow the normal year rituals.</p>

	follows the normal year rituals.		
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The Katameros of the Passion Week

The “Katameros” of the Passion Week contains readings of the hours of the Holy Passion Week, which most people follow and attend. It is based on hours; the system of the hours is: five hours in the morning and five hours in the evening. On the Palm Sunday, the ninth and eleventh hours are prayed with the same passion week system and always prayed before the five evening hours of that day (which is the evening of the Monday of the holy Pascha)

As we explained before, that the day in the church life starts from the sunset of the day before. The same will be in the prayers of the holy Pascha, so if we are starting the prayer on Monday morning, we say “the first hour of the Monday morning”, and so on, the third, sixth, ninth and eleventh. When we start the evening service, we say “the first hour of the evening of the Tuesday of the holy Pascha” and so on to the eleventh hour.

Also on the Palm Sunday, after finishing the Holy Communion with the joyous tunes of the Palm Sunday, being a great Lordly feast; the priest does not conclude as usual but he closes the curtain of the sanctuary and starts praying the general funeral for all the congregation. This funeral is prayed as we cannot conduct any service different from the hours of the holy Pascha. So, just in case someone dies during the Passion week, that person had already attended the funeral. His body in the coffin attends one of the hours of the holy Pascha, and some of the water that attended the general funeral and is kept in the church is sprinkled on his body and then he is buried.

On the Holy Great Thursday, the readings of the morning hours, are divided on the service of that day. The readings of the first hour is included in a certain order during the morning incense raising. Then the basin used for the “lakan” is filled with water to attend the prayers of the third, sixth and ninth hours. Then the prayers of the “Lakan” are conducted, then the holy mass; at the end of it, the curtain of the sanctuary is closed and the eleventh hour of that day is prayed during Holy Communion.

The Holy Great Friday, being the main day of the Pascha, all the gospels of its hours are prayed from the four gospels; i.e. the hours of the evening and the whole Friday are explaining the steps of the crucifixion of our Lord; each single event of them is read from the four gospels. Only the first hour of the evening of the Holy Friday, its four gospels are all taken from the gospel of St John the Evangelist, and are called the sections of the Holy Spirit “the Paraclete”. The morning hours of the Holy Great Friday itself, are six hours and have a certain order different from the normal hours of the Holy Pascha. They go from the first hour to the twelfth hour which is prayed in the first chorus with opening the curtain of the sanctuary and taking away all the black flags. The twelfth hour is concluded by the burial service. Then the psalms are read until psalm 150.

Then comes the resurrection, there is a special “katameors” (for the Holy fifty days), which starts with the readings of the Resurrection Sunday and goes along until the Sunday of the Pentecost when the Holy Spirit descended upon the holy apostles like tongues of fire. The readings of this “Katameros” of the fifty days is based on a similar system of weeks as explained for the “Katameros” of the holy great fasting. But we should note here that the readings of all the fifty days have no additions like the ones of the great fasting. They go like the normal year days (psalm and gospel for vespers, psalm and gospel of early morning incense, pauline epistle, catholicon epistle, acts and psalm and gospel for the mass).

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There are other books that are used in different services according to the need of the believers, which also contain some readings selected from the Bible. Those books are considered books of service and are not from the group of “Katameros” books.

Those books are:

1. The prayer of the Absolution of the women after giving birth
2. Prayers for baptising a new believer
3. The prayer of the water after 7 days (prior to a child’s baptism)
4. The prayers for weddings
5. The sacrament of Holy Unction (Anointment of the sick)
6. The book of Pentecost afternoon {Prayer of “El-Sagda” (the kneeling down)}
7. The prayers for funerals
8. The prayers of the 3 masses of “Lakan”
9. The prayer of blessing new homes and properties

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SECTION FOUR

This section is divided into two main subsections:

- a) The structure of the Holy Mass (Liturgy) with its different sections
- b) Hymnology - study of different hymns in the church worship life

A. The structure of the Holy Mass (Liturgy)

The Holy Liturgy is divided into:

- The service of the evening incense which contains “Agpia” prayer, praises, and incense raising.
- Midnight praises which contains “Agpia” prayer, praises and the priest’s absolution
- The service of the early morning incense, which contains “Agpia” prayer, early morning “Zoxologies” and incense raising.
- The service of the offertory :
 - 1) Preparation and offertory
 - 2) Mass of the catechumen
 - 3) Mass of the believers

This is what we call the Holy Mass, it shows you how much you miss if you only attend part of it. We will briefly explain them all.

First section: the service of morning and evening incense.

It starts with the prayers of the “Agpia” (this word is derived from the Greek word “agp” which means “hour”. Hence, the “Agpia” means “prayers of the hours”).

The Agpia

The “Agpia” has 7 hours plus one hour for the Monks (the prayer of the veil of the day). Any one can pray the veil prayer but it is long so the Monks usually are the only ones who pray it because they have dedicated their lives to the Lord. The book of “Agpia” has morning, 3rd, 6th, 9th, 11th, 12th, veil of the day, and midnight prayer, which is comprised of 3 services and a conclusion.

Each hour of the “Agpia” has:

- Introduction: Our Father, Thanksgiving prayer, Psalm 50
- Psalms
- Gospel
- Sections of prayers after the Gospel followed by:
 - the Trisagion (Holy God, Holy Almighty...), Our Father...
 - Hail to ST Mary
 - The Beginning of the Creed – “We honour you mother of true light”
 - The Creed
 - Lord have mercy 41 times
 - Holy, Holy, Holy
 - Absolution
 - Concluding prayer

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In the morning and in the evening we add other prayers, which are: the section starting with “let us praise with the angels...” in the morning; and the section starting with “Lord by your grace protect us...” in the evening. This is the main frame of the hourly prayers of the “Agpia”. The only prayer which is slightly different is the midnight prayer.

In the church life, we fulfill the seven hours’ prayers in the one-day service. The mass and the preparation for it starts from the eve of the day e.g. the Sunday mass starts with vespers on Saturday night where some of the “Agpia” prayers are prayed, and the rest of them are prayed the next day in the mass. By the end of the Mass we should have prayed the seven hours. For example, on Saturday we go to church in the late afternoon. We start by praying the 9th, 11th and 12th hour prayers, then the praises before the raising of incense (vespers), followed by the incense raising. Then we pray the midnight prayer of the “Agpia”, followed by the midnight praise. In the following morning we pray the morning prayer from the “Agpia” (first hour) then the raising of incense, then section 1 of the mass starting with the 3rd and 6th hours. By this, the seven hours of the “Agpia” have been completed in the full service of the one day.

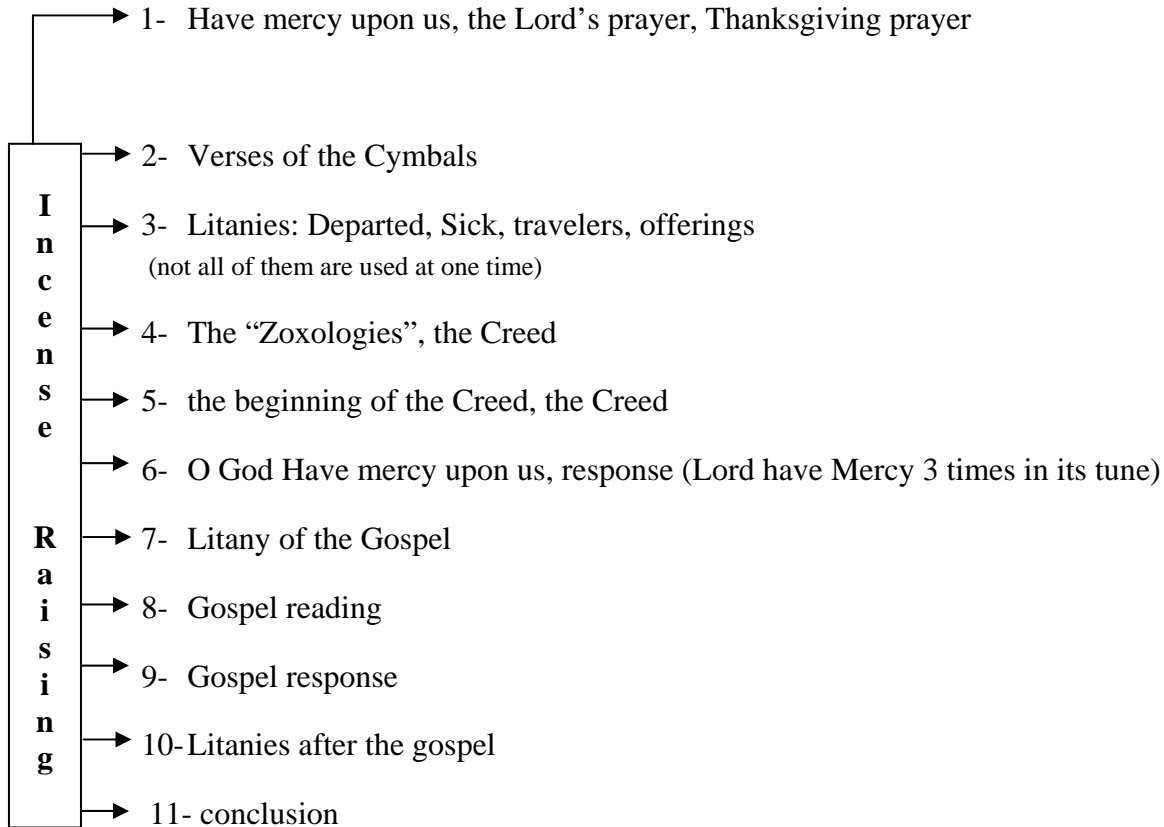
Incense Raising

The evening incense raising is known by the word “**Vespers**”, and the morning incense raising is known by the word “**Matins**”.

I would like to highlight here, that in recent times the majority of the congregation neglects attending the incense raising not realising its great importance being a part of the Holy Mass. The church guided by the Holy Spirit, have put the service of the incense raising on Biblical understanding according to the verse: “*Let my prayer be set before You as incense, the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice.*” (Ps 141:2)

To easily understand the structure of the incense raising service (evening or morning), I will put it in a diagram (see diagram next page).

Diagram explaining the structure of the incense raising service



Introduction

We notice something here, at the very beginning of incense raising when the priest starts by opening the curtain of the sanctuary; he begins by saying "*Have mercy upon us O God the Father the Almighty...*". Also this is the beginning of any other service conducted in the church. There is a beautiful deep spiritual meaning in it, which I felt I have to stop at it before explaining the sections of incense raising. Also we notice that even in the personal prayers at home there is something similar in meaning but not in the same wording with which the believer starts his "Agpia" prayer at home.

Some of the spiritual meanings in this beginning are:

1. "Have mercy upon us" is just asking Him to allow us to call Him, to talk to Him, pray to Him because, any time you pray, God inclines His ear to listen to you. He is surrounded by the praises of the Cherubim, the Seraphim, and all the hosts of Angels; but every time we pray He listens. It is great love and mercy from Him to listen to us, considering our many sins. If God will look to our sins He will never be pleased to listen to us or even look upon us, as in (Isaiah 1: 15). And we know that none of us is without sin at any moment of life. That is why it is very befitting to start by asking Him to have mercy upon us before we raise our faces and lift our voices in front of Him, especially standing in front of His Holy altar.

2. Just after this beginning ("Have mercy upon us O God..."), the priest to announces all to pray "Our Father who art in heaven...". God made us His children and granted us to call Him "Father". Calling God our Father in the Old Testament did not exist, it has started from our Lord when He said "When you pray say "Our Father Who art in Heaven...". So through His mercy and by His incarnation to redeem us and renew our nature which was corrupted, we can say Our Father. So the order here is going spiritually perfect, that we firstly ask His mercy, then secondly we dare to call Him "Our Father...".

3. After praying “Our Father...”, the priest starts the prayer of thanksgiving. Here it is following the beautiful spiritual order which is: with His mercy upon us, we dared to call Him Father, so we feel that we have to thank Him for this. Hence, the prayer of thanksgiving comes in place. We notice in the prayer of thanksgiving that we thank our God “on every condition, for every condition and in every condition”. Here, no matter what circumstances we are in, it is enough for us to feel that He accepted me as a son or daughter, and I dare to call Him Father. This in itself is worth a lot of thanks, no matter what condition we are in.

This is to give you just a little taste of the spirituality hidden behind the rituals, and why the church fathers, guided by the Holy Spirit, put the sections of the prayers in that very order.

Explaining the parts of the incense raising mentioned above.

We can stop at each section explaining it ritually, and also deeply understanding it spiritually. I think that the time of that course will not be sufficient for this, so here I will explain only ritually in brief the sections of incense raising.

1. The priest enters the sanctuary, kneels before the altar and kisses it, and takes the cross from on the altar. Standing outside in front of the royal door, he opens the curtain of the sanctuary from left to right, with the cross in his hand and while praying “have mercy upon us O God...”. Then he announces to all the Lord’s prayer, then prays the prayer of thanksgiving with its responses.
2. The deacons outside leading the congregation chant the “verses of cymbals”. During that the priest enters the sanctuary with the right foot, the deacon brings the censor and the priest puts in it five spoons of incense and raises the incense around the altar with the ritual order then stands at the middle of the royal door and raises the incense in front of it in the ritual order, then waits in his place until the deacons finish the verses of cymbals.
3. The priest starts the litanies. Always in vespers he prays only the litany of the departed (there is an opinion to pray the litany of the sick in vespers of the great Lordly feasts). In the mornings of all Saturdays, only the litany of the departed is prayed; as our Lord was in the tomb on the Saturday morning. In the other days of the week, the priest prays two litanies. The first is fixed, which is the litany of the sick. The second one varies; in all joyous days, Sundays and normal days without fasting, the litany of oblation is prayed after the litany of the sick. In the days of the holy Great Fasting (except for Saturdays and Sundays), the litany of the travellers is prayed. In all other fasting days away from the great fasting and three days of Nineveh, if the oblations (the bread for the offertory) are present in the church, we pray the litany of oblations after the litany of the sick; if not, we pray the litany of the travellers instead.
4. After the litanies, the priest raises the incense with which we call “the full procession of incense” around the altar and the whole church in its usual order. During that the deacons leading the congregation pray together the “Zoxologies” for St Mary, archangel Michael, the apostles, St Mark the apostle and any choice of heavenly hosts, martyrs and saints according to the individual church order.
5. The priest standing in the middle of the “royal door”, announces to all reciting the beginning of the Creed then the Creed. During this, he is holding the cross in his hand and the deacon prepares for him three lit candles to hold them with the cross.
6. While the deacons are chanting the conclusion of the Creed in its tune, the priest with the cross and three candles in his right hand, silently signs the cross towards the south, west and north. Then standing towards the east, he starts praying “Have mercy upon us...” with its known tune while lifting up both his hands. (In the incense raising of the two feasts of the cross and the Palm Sunday, there should be a big wooden cross adorned with palms or roses and fitted with three candles. Here,

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the priest holds this cross while praying “God have mercy upon us...” instead of the altar cross with the three candles.)

After the priest finishes this prayer, he stays in his place with the cross and candles in his right hand until the deacons finish chanting “Lord have mercy” three times in its tune.

7. While the priest is in his place, after the deacons chant “Lord have mercy” three times, the priest starts the litany of the gospel and he signs the congregation with the cross and the three candles when saying “peace be with you all”. Then, he gives the cross and the candles to the deacon who is ready with the censor and the box of incense, he takes the censor from the deacon, signs the box of incense and puts one spoon of incense in the censor and starts praying the litany of the gospel.

vers. Some one sick, some one traveling, and any movement even to work for 10 min

8. At the end of the litany of the gospel, the priest turns around the altar while offering incense with the deacon in front of him carrying the gospel and the cross until he reaches the royal door and starts praying the usual introduction for reading the Holy Gospel while raising incense and then the gospel is read. It is always the order that the highest rank present at the time in the church reads the gospel. (The patriarch, or the bishop, or the priest if none of them is present).

9. At the end or reading the gospel, the response for the gospel is chanted by the deacons leading the congregation. We should note here that there is a fixed response for the normal yearly days while there are different responses for different feasts and occasions.

10. The priest is ready in the middle of the royal door, holding the censor in his right hand while the deacons are chanting the response for the gospel. After it, the priest prays “the litanies after the gospel”, which are called the small litanies (the litany for the peace of the church; the litany for the patriarch; the litany for the place; the litany for the waters, the rains, the plants and the winds of the heaven; and the litany for the congregation).

11. By the end of the litanies, the priest announces to all the Lord’s prayer while he enters the sanctuary, prays the two first absolutions for “the Son”, then he takes the cross from on the altar, goes outside at the royal door facing east (preferable to be kneeling) he prays the third absolution, then the deacon chants the concluding hymn and the priest says the blessing and sends the people in peace.

B. Hymnology

The order of the Hymns in the Holy Church

The hymnody (the hymns) in the Holy Church are a very deep and profound matter; you can never fully understand its depth. It covers the whole Coptic year with all its different occasions, services, celebrations and rituals. The Coptic Church is really a unique church in her hymnology, and you can easily feel the Holy Spirit guiding the church in distributing the hymns around the year with the different tunes which really match the occasion and really stir the feeling of the human soul.

In general, the hymns of the Church are grouped according to:

1. The tune of the hymn and
2. The system or group of the hymn.

The structure of the Hymnology of the Church

1. The hymns of the Holy Masses and occasions and other Church services submit to one of these main tunes:

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- a) Normal year days
 - b) Joyful tunes
 - c) Sad tunes
2. The sections of the Holy Mass which the priest prays from the beginning of the prayer of reconciliation till the end submit to 3 main tunes, which depend on the Liturgy itself:
- a) Liturgy of St. Basil
 - b) Liturgy of St. Gregory
 - c) Liturgy of St. Cyril
3. All the parts of the praises and the 2 hymns of the first 2 sections of the Mass of the Believers (which follow the creed), which are entitled ASPASMOS fall under these two systems or groups of hymnology.
- a) “Watos”
 - b) “Adam”

(ASPASMOS means ‘peace by exchanging a kiss’ in Coptic. The “Aspasmos” hymns are the ‘rejoice Oh Mary’ and ‘Oh Lord of hosts’. The hymn ‘rejoice Oh Mary’ is under the heading of “Aspasmos” because God reconciled us to Himself and united us to be one in Him, so we have to reconcile with each other. The second hymn ‘Oh Lord of hosts, look down on your vine’ is also called “Aspasmos” because it is a prayer of reconciliation to us, as He is looking upon us after we had been in enmity because of sin before our Lord Jesus Christ saved us. Without having peace we cannot start the “Anaphora” (which is a Greek word meaning the offertory). This is the beginning of the real consecration of the Sacrament in order that we may have Him inside us. (We cannot partake of His Body and Blood without Love towards one another and His love to us).

The word “Adam” refers to the first word in the first verse in Coptic for the “Theotokia” of Monday. Monday is the middle day of the three days where we use the tunes “Adam” (Sunday, Monday and Tuesday). So it was taken to apply on the tunes used in the praises of those days. This has been taken with the understanding that the “Theotokia” is the main or core section of the daily praises.

The word “Watos” is also the first word in the first verse in Coptic for the Thursday “theotokia”, which is again the middle day of the days for the tunes “Watos” in praises (Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday).

There is a deep spiritual understanding here concerning the two words ‘Watos’ and ‘Adam’. The first verse in the Thursday “Theotokia” starting with the word “Watos” indicated the first symbol for the incarnation of Our Lord Jesus Christ to save us, which is the bush seen by Moses which was full of fire but never burning, as a symbol to St Mary who had the divinity inside her womb without burning her. While the first verse of the Monday “Theotokia” starting with the word “Adam”, refers to the pleasure of God to save Adam, returning him to his rank by salvation through God’s incarnation.

4. Explanation for the order of Tasbeha
- a) The sections of ‘Tasbeha’ or of ‘praises’ (like the 4 “hoases” and the introductions) have only 1 tune the whole year. Only the 4th “hoas” changes slightly during the month of “Koiak”.
 - b) The “Theotokia” of midnight praises falls under the two sections ‘Adam’ and ‘Watos’ and each of them in its system has a fixed tune the whole year, with only a slight change during the month of “Koiak”.

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(The “Epsalies” of all the days also fall under the two systems ‘Adam Epsalies’ and ‘Watos’ “Epsalies”. Note: that the tunes of both the “Adam” and “Watos Epsalies” change from the normal tune to a different tune in the joyous days and also in the month of “Koiak”.)

The other sections of the praises (the congregation of the saints, the doxologies, the “lobsh” of the “Theotokia”, the conclusion of the “Theotokia”, the responses of the gospels during the mass, and psalm 150 at the end of the mass during Holy Communion) have 6 different tunes as follows:

- i. Yearly
 - ii. Joyous
 - iii. Month of “Koiak”
 - iv. The Holy Great Fasting (Monday to Friday)
 - v. The Holy Great Fasting (Saturday to Sunday)
 - vi. Palm Sunday and the feasts of the cross.
5. In some occasions like the month of “Koiak”, or the joyous Saturday, or the Great Holy Fasting Midnight praises; or the Midnight praises of the preparation day and the great Lordly feasts, we add sections to the Midnight praises, and sometimes they have different tunes, but they never change the basic order of the Midnight praises main sections.

The verses of cymbals

i) They are prayed during incense raising (evening or early morning) after the Prayer of Thanksgiving. Also some other verses of cymbals are prayed in some services like weddings and funerals. They are chanted in 3 different tunes:

- a) The normal year tune
- b) The joyous tune which applies to the special verses for the Lordly Feasts, or the joyous occasion we are in, then turns to the normal yearly tune for the rest of the verses.
- c) Only for the three great Lordly Feasts (The birth of Christ, the baptism of Christ and the resurrection) there is an additional section taken from the beginning of the early morning “Zoxologies” prayed in its special joyous tune, then the verses of the feast are prayed, then the necessary verses of the saints of the church in their normal yearly tune. Then we conclude with the verses of the hymn “ep-ouro” (O king of peace...) in the same yearly tune. (This is known in the church terminology by “the seven tunes”).

ii) During the Holy Great Fasting and the three days of Ninevah’s fasting, we pray vespers only on Saturdays and likewise on the evening of the feast of the cross which falls during the fast, and on the evening of the feast of annunciation (if it comes during the fast). According to this the verses of cymbals are prayed only in the evenings of the above mentioned days and in the early morning incense raising of the Saturdays, Sundays, the feast of the cross and the feast of annunciation if it falls during the fasting. For the rest of the days of the holy great fasting and the three days of Ninevah’s fasting we do not pray verses of cymbals in the early morning incense raising, but it is replaced by chanting the word “kirie-eleyson” = “Lord have mercy in a special long tune.

iii) In the “Adam” and “Watos” days, the verses of cymbals are the same except for the introduction being different by 2 verses in the “Watos” and 3 or 5 verses for the ‘Adam’. The difference is in words only while keeping the same tune.

6. The two Feasts of the Cross are not considered Lordly feasts, but they are treated like the Lordly feasts; this means that the Mass and the praises are prayed in the Joyous tunes (so are the procession, the responses to the Gospels and Psalm 150 during the Holy Communion). The sections of the Midnight Praises with changeable tunes follow the 6th tune (for Palm Sunday and the Feasts of the Cross, see above #4).

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7. a) The general services (Baptism, Unction of the sick, funerals, blessing new homes etc) submit to the tune of that time of the year.

b) The engagements and weddings are always prayed according to the joyous tune no matter what time of year we are in (but they should not be performed during the fasting days)
8. Passion Week, which is from the 9th hour of Palm Sunday till the verses of the psalm during Holy communion of the Joyous Saturday, has its own tunes that differ or repeat according to the hour and the day of the Passion week. There are readings of a psalm and gospel and then after it psalm 22 is chanted in a special tune that is used only on joyous Saturday.
9. The glorifications that are prayed during the feasts of saints, and in different occasions, fall under the original tune of the hymn or the way of the glorification according to its occasion and some verses at its end are prayed in the tune of Palm Sunday. Note that the tunes of glorification for the saints are constant throughout the year regardless of the time of year.

The structure of “Tasbeha”

“Tasbeha” prepares the Church and the believers to receive Christ the king who is coming in the Holy Mass. The “Tasbeha” is like the Old Testament which leads to the New Testament (the Holy Mass). The Old Testament tells us about Christ whom we knew. The “Tasbeha” tells us about Christ whom we will receive. That is why “Tasbeha” is always prayed outside the altar, and the curtain is closed. “Tasbeha” is very rich in Theology, Rituals, tradition and Spirituality.

“Tasbeha” praises are divided into 3 main praises of “Tasbehas”.

1. The vespers praises – prayed before the evening incense raising
2. The midnight praises, to be prayed before the “Tasbeha” of the early incense raising
3. The praises of the early morning (which precede the early morning incense raising).

‘Epsalmodia’ comes from the ‘Epsal’ – which means ‘praises which are chanted’ and ‘odeia’ – which means ‘the book from which we get the praises’.

Hoas – this is a Coptic word which means Praise.

The Epsalia is a group of verses chanted in tune and always ordered in an alphabetical order according to the Coptic alphabet.

Zoxologia – is a Greek word composed of two sections; Zoxa which means Glory and Logia which means blessing. So as a whole it means a glorification for a blessing.

Theotokia – this is a Greek word. Theotokos is the mother of God, so the Theotokia is that which is about the mother of God.

Lobsh – this is a Coptic word which means explanation. It always follows the Theotokia to highlight the meanings.

Difnar – Its original word is ‘antephenar’. This is a Greek word which means history explained in a way which glorifies the Saint or the occasion.

1. The Evening Praises before Evening Incense Raising

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1. It starts with the prayers of the 9th, 11th and 12th hours from the 'Agpia' (which is the share of vespers in praying the whole seven hours of the 'Agpia' in completion of the full service of the one day, as explained in section 3).
2. After the 'Agbia' prayers, we pray the Hymn of 'ni ethnos teerou' which means 'all you nations'.
3. The fourth 'Hoas'. The end of 'ni ethnos teerou' leads you to the hymn of the fourth 'Hoas'.
4. The 'Epsali(s)'. On Saturday and Sunday we have two 'Epsalies' (one for St Mary and the original 'Epsali' for our Lord Jesus Christ). From Monday to Friday, we have only one main 'Epsali' for our Lord Jesus Christ.
5. The 'Theotokia'.
6. The 'Lobsh' of the day.
7. The conclusion of the day's 'Theotokia'.

Note: In some occasions, like the Saturday of the Great Fasting, the 1st four Saturdays after the Great Feast of the Resurrection, and all the feasts of St. Mary (the memorial feasts on the 21st of the month and the memorial days of the 29th of 'Baramhat' for the Annunciation), there is a commentary that is read between the 'Lobsh' and the conclusion of the day's service.

2. Midnight Praises

It should be prayed after Midnight (3am) but it is prayed after Vespers here in Australia.

The structure of the midnight praises

1. It starts with praying the 3 services of Midnight prayers in the 'Agpia' :
2. The beginning of the Midnight Praises, which is composed of 2 sections, one permanent: 'Tenthino' (arise children of light) and 'tennav' (we look at the resurrection of our Lord). 'Tennav' is prayed in all the 50 days after the resurrection, and then only on Sundays until the fourth Sunday of 'Hatour' (Because we then start 'Koiak').
3. 1st 'Hoas': the praise of Moses the prophet and his sister Miriam the prophetess after they crossed the Red Sea
4. 2nd 'Hoas' which is psalm 136 chanted in verses.
5. 3rd 'Hoas' – here we get all the creation to share with us in praising the Lord. The last two verses and the words 'hoas erof ari ho chasf' have a long tune which can be prayed (takes about 10 minutes). The tune that ends the 3rd 'Hoas' leads into the 'Epsali' of the 3 young men.
6. 'Epsali' of the 3 young men
7. The praise of the 3 young men, also called the introduction to the congregation of the saints.
8. The congregation of the Holy Saints. Note the order of the congregation of the holy Saints according to our church rites is:
 - ❖ St. Mary
 - ❖ The Heavenly Hosts

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- ❖ The Patriarchs; Abraham, Isaac and Jacob
- ❖ The Great prophets
- ❖ John the Baptist with the 144, 000 virgins of the Revelation
- ❖ The Apostles
- ❖ The Martyrs
- ❖ The Confessors
- ❖ The Saints of wilderness and cross bearers
- ❖ The Ecumenical council fathers (like Sts. Athanasius, Dioscoros, Cyril)
- ❖ The Kings and Queens involved in Church life (like Sts. Constantine and Helena)
- ❖ Concluding general verse
- ❖ The patriarch and the bishop of the diocese.

This is the order we always use whenever we glorify the Saints (in 'Tasbeha', in the Holy Mass, in 'Zoxologies', in Glorifications, for the order of placing icons on the 'Iconostatsis') We say 'ari-epresvevin' (intercede on our behalf) for St. Mary, the Heavenly Hosts and for St. John the Baptist (because he was called the angel coming before the Lord) and the 144, 000 virgins because they were seen in Revelation which is related to Heaven. Therefore we say 'ari presvevin' for anyone who is heavenly or called in heaven like an angel. We say 'toabh em epchoise' (pray to the Lord on our behalf) for any saint who completed his struggle on earth and his soul is in paradise.

The Midnight Praises then continue as following:

9. The 'Zoxologies' (in the same order as for the congregation of Saints). The 'Zoxology' highlights the actions of the saint in a few verses. Its tune is the same as that of the last 2 verses of the Congregation of the Saints. If the doxologies are prayed in the 3 'Adam days' then 3 verses are added to the end of the 'watos' 'theotokia'.
10. The fourth 'Hoas' follows the 'Zoxology'. Its tune is constant throughout the year except for a slight variation during the month of 'Koiak', and there is an addition to the third section (starting with "eph-eranaph") in the midnight praise during the month of 'Koiak'.
11. The 'Epsali' or 'Epsalis' (which is the praise of the day). On Saturday and Sunday, there is always an 'Epsali' for St. Mary and for our Lord Jesus Christ. On the other days of the week, there is only an 'Epsali' for our Lord Jesus Christ. If a Lordly feast falls on a day from Monday to Friday, the 'Epsali' of the feast replaces the 'Epsali' of the day. If the occasion for the Lord is on a Saturday or a Sunday, the 'Epsali' of the occasion replaces the 'Epsali' for St. Mary, but we still pray the 'Epsali' for the Lord. There is one occasion where 3 'Epsalies' are prayed: during the Apostles fasting we pray the 'Epsali' for St Mary, then the Apostles then the 'Epsali' for the Lord. Note: There is a book which contains the 'Epsalis' for the saints, which can be prayed optionally, and if the feast of that saint falls on a Saturday or Sunday then we will be having three 'Epsalies'.
12. The 'Theotokia' of the day (which is about St. Mary the mother of God).
13. The 'Lobsh' is a contemplation or some additional meaning for the verses of the 'Theotokia' to end it. It is always followed by the reading of the 'Difnar' or the commentary, then the conclusion of the 'Theotokia'. In the praises of Saturday and Sunday, the 'Lobsh' takes a different name but it is the same thing.
14. The 'Difnar'
15. The conclusion of 'Theotokia'

16. The Beginning of the Creed and the Creed
17. The petitions with 'Lord, have mercy'
18. Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of Hosts ...
19. The Lord's prayer
20. If the midnight praises are prayed in their proper timing and it joins the mass, then after the Lord's prayer, the priest prays the absolution of priests, then they start praying the first hour of the 'Agpia' (the morning prayer). Then they continue with the early morning 'Zoxologies', start the early morning incense raising which leads to the holy mass.

Note: If we are praying midnight praises for Sunday, the second 'Hoas' will be straight after the 1st 'Hoas'. If we're praying midnight praises for any other day, we take the sections 7,8,9 of the Sunday 'Theotoki' in between. These sections start with a reading from the Gospel of St. Luke: 'Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace...', then continues up to the end of the ninth section of the Sunday 'Theotoki'. Then they pray the 2nd 'Hoas'.

3. The Early morning praise

1. Morning prayer from 'Agbia'
2. Early morning doxologies – these have a permanent tune over the whole year, and it starts with a nice section which tells about our relationship with God, then some verses for the Saints. The only change in the tune is during the three great Lordly feasts (The Birth of Christ, the Baptism of Christ and the Resurrection). These 'Zoxologies' are prayed in their certain tune as explained before.

The Conclusion. This is always the conclusion of 'Adam Theotoki', which starts with 'nek nai ou Panouti' (Your mercies oh God).

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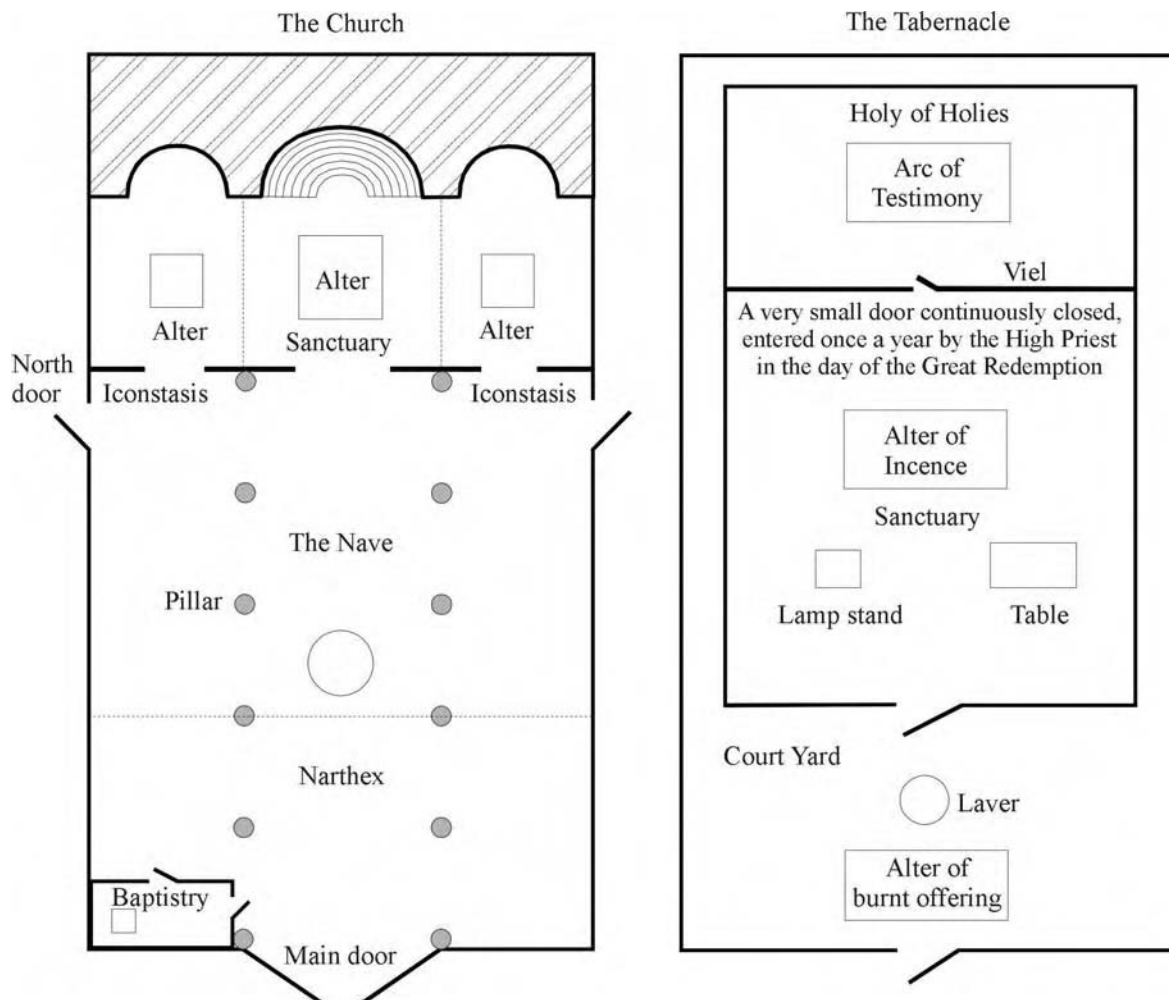
SECTION FIVE

The Church Building between the Old and New Testaments:

The church, the house of God is the place where God meets with His people. This is a Biblical statement by God Himself when He indicated to Moses the prophet “build Me a holy place to dwell in the midst of my people” (Exodus 25: 8).

Looking to the construction of the churches in the New Testament compared to that of the tabernacle given by God to Moses in the Old Testament; you find them very similar. The house of God built by Solomon the king is exactly the tabernacle that Moses constructed, but in a real building of stones. As God is He Himself the same yesterday, today and tomorrow, you find our churches have almost the same shape and interior design as the tabernacle in the Old Testament but in a way to match the life of the New Testament. The changes here have taken place in the light of salvation with which our Lord Jesus Christ shone upon us. (See diagram)

The tabernacle was kept in the middle of Israel in the Old Testament (because God instructed them



that He wanted to be in the midst of the people). Only the high priest could enter the Holy of Holies, and that was only once a year in the day called “the day of atonement/the day of the great redemption” (Leviticus 16).

Why do we build the Church of the New Testament facing the East?

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1. It was prophesied about our Lord Christ that He is the sun of righteousness and that healing is in His wings (Malachi 4:2). This is repeated in Luke 1:76-80 ('to give light to those who are in darkness').
2. Our Lord Jesus Christ saved us through his blood, and opened paradise to us, and the paradise was towards the east if the whole Earth.
3. The Lord in His incarnation for our salvation, came to us in the middle east, and it was prophesied about St. Mary His mother that she is adored in the east. The Lord entered and came out of it (the east), and the door is shut and sealed as always (Ezekiel 44:12) "Then He brought me back to the outer gate of the sanctuary which faces toward the *east*, but it was shut. And the Lord said to me, "This gate shall be shut; it shall not be opened, and no man shall enter by it, because the Lord God of Israel has entered by it; therefore it shall be shut".
4. When the Lord ascended to heaven, he ascended towards the East, and He will come back to us from the east, and this could be understood by relating the verses Matthew 24:27, Acts 1:11 and Zechariah 14:4 together. It was also said that His coming will be like lightning which appears from the east.
Matthew 24: 27 "For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be."
Acts 1: 10-11 "And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, who also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven."
Zechariah 14: 4 "And in that day, His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which faces Jerusalem on the east."
5. The appearance of the sun from the east is the announcing of a start of a new day in our life. We have had our birth and a new day for our life in Christ, and every time we enter Church hoping to look to Him being our sun, our east and our new life, hoping to grow up with Him until we are fully with Him in paradise.
6. Our Lord Jesus Christ was crucified on the cross on Golgotha looking to the west. His crucifixion is the centre of Christianity and our salvation. Our preaching is centred around preaching the Lord and Him crucified [1 Corinthians 1:23 : "*but we preach the Lord crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness*", (1 Corinthians 2:2) : "*For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified*", (Galatians 3:1) : "*O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified*"]. **To strengthen our struggle for salvation, we look to the East to see Him crucified.**
7. The star that led the three wise-men (the kings of the east) to witness the birth of Our Lord Jesus Christ appeared to them in the east and led them to where the Lord was born in Judea, in the Middle East. This was to announce that the church of the New Testament will embrace both the people of the Old Testament (the Jews) and the rest of the entire, world who were called the gentiles, represented here by the three wise-men of the East. This is to indicate that the Lord came to save the whole world as He Himself said "*And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd*" (John 10: 16).
8. The Holy Bible mentions in many sections that the glory of the Lord God comes from the East as in the following verse "*and behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the east.*" (Ezekiel 43: 2)

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9. During the capture of Israel to Babylon, and Daniel the prophet was among those captured, he insisted not to worship the idols. He was strong in his faith that he chose to worship his God not secretly but openly. It says in the Bible that he used to open the windows of his room and stand praying towards the east. (Daniel 6: 1-10)
10. All the Holy Fathers of the Early Church prayed towards the east. For example, St Arsenius, the teacher of the kings' children, when he came to the desert of Egypt and became a monk, he used to stand at sunset and continue praying, his prayer increasing in depth to the extent that he did not feel time except when the sun came up and hit his eyes. This indicates that he as well as all the holy fathers inherited from generation to generation, since the apostolic era, to pray towards the east.

Here we mention that it is historically recorded that both the building of churches and the prayers of all Christians all around the world was towards the east, before the division of the church in the year 451.

B. Why should we stand while praying inside the Church?

A simple study throughout the Holy Bible will reveal many verses that indicate the necessity of standing during prayer. Here, we will mention some of them.

- | | |
|----------------------|--|
| <i>1 Kings 17:1</i> | Elijah told Ahab he was standing before the Lord of Hosts. |
| <i>Isaiah 6:14</i> | When he went up and saw the throne of God, he saw all the hosts standing before the Lord |
| <i>Ezekiel 2:1-2</i> | The same thing is reported |
| <i>Luke 18:12</i> | The Pharisee and the tax collector are both reported as having stood before God to pray |
| <i>Mark 11:25</i> | The Lord says whenever you stand for prayer, you pray like so (the Lord's prayer) |

C. The Use Of Incense In The Church

Spiritual meanings and Biblical proofs behind using incense in the Church

1. Biblical References
 - a) In the very first church established by Moses the prophet according to the order and detailed directions of God Himself, Moses was clearly instructed to use incense in the worship : *"You shall make an altar to burn incense on; you shall make it of acacia wood"* (Exodus 30: 1-7)
 - b) The Lord ordered Aaron the high priest through Moses that offering incense is a compulsory commandment to be done eternally over the generations : *"Aaron shall burn on it sweet incense every morning; when he tends the lamps, he shall burn incense on it. And when Aaron lights the lamps at twilight, he shall burn incense on it, a perpetual incense before the Lord throughout your generations"* (Exodus 30: 7-8)
 - c) The Protestants say that incense was used in the Old Testament to cover the offensive smell from the burnt sacrifices, but if you read Exodus 27, (which explains the altar of the burnt offering), Exodus 29, (which explains how to offer the burnt sacrifice), and Exodus 30, which describes the altar of the incense inside the sanctuary, you will find that

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incense is raised at a different time to that of the sacrifices. This refutes their claims that incense was used to cover the smell of burnt sacrifices.

- d) When the people of Israel upset the Lord God by their rebellious acts and God brought a plague against them which caused massive death, Moses instructed Aaron to rush with a censor full of incense, and where Aaron reached and raised incense the plague stopped. This indicates the importance and power of incense raising during prayer (Numbers 16:41-50).
- e) To realise how important the offering of incense was, in Numbers 8, when the sons of Aaron offered the incense incorrectly, they were consumed by fire. And in Leviticus 16, when Korah, Dathan and Abiram forced themselves to offer incense while they were not allowed to, God punished them - the earth opened and swallowed them with their families.
- f) To answer the claim of the other churches that incense was used in the Old Testament only, let them look to the book of Malachi in which the Lord Himself indicates that incense shall be offered all the time, under the sun, in glorification of His Holy Name: *“for from the rising of the sun, even to its going down, my name shall be great among the Gentiles; in every place incense shall be offered to My name, and a pure offering; for My name shall be great among the nations”* (Malachi 1: 11).
- g) We all hope to go to heaven, and in heaven, St. John the beloved saw incense being offered by the twenty-four priests before the throne of the almighty God. He mentioned that all the prayers of the people on earth is raised before God by the censors in the hands of the twenty-four priests. The raising of incense is mentioned more than once in the book of revelation and the church arranged in the rituals of the overnight watch of the holy great Saturday, that every time the incense raising is mentioned the priest stands and takes the censor and raises incense.

At the time when the priest goes around the church raising incense, if you look up, you will see a cloud of incense. This reminds us of the spiritual meanings behind the usage of incense in the church during prayer.

- h) The clouds have been used in the Bible to express spiritual understandings that relate to our beliefs and salvation. Some examples for this are:
 - ❖ in the Old Testament the Lord expressed His happiness with His people by appearing in a heavy cloud as in **Exodus 24:15-16** : *“Then Moses went up into the mountain, and a cloud covered the mountain. Now the glory of the Lord rested on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it six days. And on the seventh day He called to Moses out of the midst of the cloud.”* **Leviticus 16:2,13** “And the Lord said to Moses: “Tell Aaron your brother not to come at just any time into the Holy Place inside the veil, before the mercy seat which is on the ark, lest he die; for I will appear in the cloud above the mercy seat.”
1 **Kings 8:10,12** (when the ark was brought into the temple) *“And it came to pass, when the priests came out of the holy place, that the cloud filled the house of the Lord, so that the priests could not continue ministering because of the cloud: for the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord”*
 - ❖ it was written in Isaiah 19: 1 that the Lord will be riding on a cloud and coming to Egypt.
 - ❖ in Hebrews 12, St Paul describes the holy saints and martyrs by the expression of “Cloud of witnesses” : *“Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of*

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witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us”
(Hebrews 12: 1).

- ❖ Matthew 17: 1-8 during the transfiguration of Our Lord, a luminous cloud covered them and God the Father witnessed for His Son through the cloud etc...

Spiritual benefits of using incense

1. It is a symbol of sacrifice, because the incense burns over the hot coals and offers a beautiful smell. We raise incense in the church to remember that our beloved Lord Jesus Christ offered Himself a pure sacrifice on the cross. His good Father smelled His sacrifice on the cross as an aromatic incense and was pleased to forgive our disobedience :
Ephesians 5: 2 “And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling aroma.”
2. At the birth of our Lord, incarnating for our salvation, the wise men from the east offered Him gifts, one of them was frankincense. This was to make it clear that our Lord is coming to offer Himself a sacrifice like the incense burnt on the coals to please His Father on our behalf.
3. From the understandings above, St Paul taught the believers that they should present themselves as a beautiful aroma smelled by others to witness for our Lord **2**
Corinthians 2: 14 “Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place”. Each time we see incense raised in the church and smell its aroma, we remember that this is the way we should present ourselves, as true Christians, before others.
4. Knowing the great sacrifice our Lord offered for our salvation, all the apostles, and after them the holy fathers of the church, offered themselves as a burnt sacrifice in serving the sheep of Christ. When we are in the church seeing and smelling the incense, we remember that we should always be ready to serve Christ in any way to the extent of sacrificing and offering ourselves as burnt offerings.
5. As when the incense put on the coals is fully consumed by the fire to give the smell, so all the martyrs and the monastic fathers offered their whole lives as a pure offering for the Lord and the whole church smelled the aroma of their virtues and sacrifice.

- ❖ All these 5 spiritual meanings are highlighted in the following verses :
Heb 12:1-3

“Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,

looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls”.

Applicable spiritual benefits for our lives from the use of incense in the church.

As we mentioned, the cloud is one of the symbols of the Lord's appearance among us. Also, we remember the Lord is among us when we see the incense (He was in the midst of the people in the tabernacle on the Old Testament through the incense). We as believers should know that as the incense is raised, we should raise our eyes and minds up and remember the heavenly throne and the 24 priests with the incense, and the angels and the incense, and raise our thoughts and understanding towards heaven (because we are humans, the physical action affects our souls). As the incense is used to purify and adorn us with its nice smell, we should remember that this should be used throughout our lives as a means to prepare our souls for Christ our Saviour, referring to Songs of Solomon 3:6 "who is this coming out of the wilderness, like pillars of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, with all the merchant fragrant powders?".

Understanding the Rituals involved in the Church Building

The Church Building

The building of the church in the New Testament is based on the tabernacle, and later the temple built by king Solomon, in the Old Testament. Its shape and interior are almost the same, but in a way to match the life of the New Testament.

Since the old times, it has been the practice to build the church either like an ark (a big ship), or in the shape of a circle, or in the shape of a cross.

- ❖ The circle basically symbolises God, who has no beginning and no end. Very few churches have been built in the shape of a circle. There is one in Old Cairo, another in Alexandria, and one in America. I think that is all, or may be just one or two more.
- ❖ The cross is our life. The Lord granted us salvation through His crucifixion. Again the churches built in the shape of the cross are not many. One of them is our church in Canberra. If you look down from a plane you will see that it is exactly in the shape of a cross, with a big dome in the middle and four vaults coming out of it.
- ❖ The majority of churches are built in the shape of a big ship. This originated from understanding Noah's ark. During the flood, only the people inside the ark were saved, and they formed the new life/world after the flood.

Likewise, the church is the ship in which we are safe from all the troubles of the sea. In the Holy Bible, the world is usually symbolised by the sea, with its tumultuous, unpredictable waves and troubles.

This is the main understanding behind building the church in the shape of a ship. There are many other meanings concerning the ranks of the church and people who work in the ship but the time is not enough to cover them.

At the end of the church are the minarets. There can be one or two, carrying the cross. They resemble the raft of a ship. They are built very high carrying the cross, so that the believers on their way to the house of God are attracted to look up to the cross and heaven. Hence, they know they are coming to a place that is part of heaven, and that in the church we live to attain or achieve heavenly life until we are worthy to be taken up to heaven.

The old churches were divided into what we call choruses or sections. The sanctuary, then the first section which is the deacons' area, then the second chorus or section which is the (laymen) area, and finally a separate area in the back of the church called the third chorus or the third section or the "chorus of the repentant". The church in the early days was very strong. She really lifted her

children up to heavenly life, and made it clear that the church is the house of God to which befits holiness, nothing unholy should be in.

This is why the third chorus was used for those who committed a sin and according to their confession father were punished by being prohibited from having Holy Communion. They were only allowed to come and attend the service in the third section, in tears and doing “Metanias” (kneeling down), seeking repentance from their sins, until they finished a period of time allocated and then they were allowed to join the second or the middle chorus of the church with the believers.

Also, in our church there is a rank of “Epi diacon” or “Subdeacon”. One of his roles in the early church was to announce and make sure that the people who were not going to receive Holy Communion, leave the church after the Creed is prayed (which comes after the Bible readings and the sermon) and to close the church doors before the beginning of what we call “The anaphora” or “the mass of the believers”. All those who attended the last section of the mass had to share the Body and the Blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. No one was allowed to stay in the church while not partaking of the Body of the Lord at the end of the Mass. We lost a lot from our old church recently.

The Dome

In the original design of a Coptic church building, there are two domes. A larger dome in the middle of the church and another on top of the altar. The dome in the middle of the church can be translucent/transparent, letting light shine through, in order to give the impression of heaven, as the church is heaven on earth; or it can be made of ceramic etc... The dome contains icons from inside. It either contains :

The icon of the Lord Jesus with His arms outstretched, looking at His people (representing the Lord who is the real shepherd of His people caring for them), or



down

Different icons in a circle around the dome (as in pictures below). In some old churches they put the icons of the 12 apostles.

In

Alternatively, there are the icons of the 4 evangelists; archangel Michael, the announcer of the resurrection; archangel Gabriel, the announcer of the birth of the Lord; the Chalice and the Holy Bread; and 4 crosses surrounding them. The way these pictures are set is as follows: one half of the circle has two crosses on both ends of the two evangelists + archangel Michael + the Chalice; and the other contains the other two evangelists + archangel Gabriel + the Holy Bread.



Explaining the symbolic meaning:

icons of the middle dome of the church and their

The four Evangelists are those who told us about our Lord Jesus Christ and His salvation. We notice that under each of the evangelists is drawn one of the four incorporeal creatures (of the rank of the Cherubim) who were seen by St John the Beloved in his revelation carrying the throne of God.

– under the picture of St Matthew the evangelist is drawn one of the four incorporeal creatures with the face of a man with six wings and full of eyes. This is because St Matthew wrote his gospel showing our Lord as the man who incarnated for our salvation.

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- under St Mark the evangelist is drawn the lion with six wings and full of eyes. This symbolises his gospel which was written to the Romans, showing our Lord Jesus Christ as the strong king. Also, St Mark starts his Gospel with the verse saying “The voice of one crying in the wilderness”.

- Under St Luke is the ox with six wings and full of eyes, as St Luke was the one who talked the most about sacrifices and offerings and related the Old Testament to the New Testament. He showed the priesthood work of the Lord being the high priests for us all.

under St John is the eagle with six wings and full of eyes. St John’s gospel is the most theological of the gospels. He was taken up to heaven and saw the revelation. He was in his letter and in his Gospel straight to the point in proving the divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ. He wrote his Gospel after he came back from Patmos (where he was on exile), and after seeing the revelation. He came back to find the church was confused about the divinity of our Lord, so he wrote to prove the divinity of our Lord, and started by saying: “In the beginning was the word, and the word was God and the word was with God”. Then he started to talk about the divinity. St John in his Gospel mentioned some miracles not mentioned in the other of the three Gospels to highlight the divinity of the Lord.

The four Incorporeal Creatures also are the carriers of the throne of God who as if pleading on behalf of all mankind about humans, about wild animals, about field’s animals, about birds, about all creation.

Archangel Gabriel is the one who announced the birth of the Lord and the birth of John the Baptist. He is the angel of the annunciation. Archangel Michael was the one who announced the resurrection of the Lord. And these are the two most important events: the birth of the Lord for our salvation, and His resurrection accomplishing or fulfilling or finishing our salvation.

The Bread and the Chalice or the Orban and the chalice are drawn because the sacrament of the Eucharist (or Holy Communion) is the most important of the sacraments. Our Lord died for our sake and gave us His Body and Blood in the form of bread and wine. This was prophesied about in the Old Testament, the book of Genesis, when Melchizedek met with Abraham and received from Abraham 10%, and gave him bread and wine as a symbol for communion.

Finally the four crosses surrounding the icons. The Cross is our life in the church. The Cross is our salvation, the Cross is everything for us in our church. As you might see the Cross is always in the beginning, the end, and the middle of the prayers. It is always in the priest’s hand.

Hence to sum up why specifically those icons are chosen to be in the middle dome of the church : it is as if the Lord is saying to us “I came down from heaven for your salvation, and my birth was announced by archangel Gabriel. My life and sayings were detailed to you by my evangelist apostles. I was crucified and I rose from the dead to complete your salvation, and my resurrection was announced to you by archangel Michael. Finally, I leave for you my Holy Body and Blood, so that you may abide in Me and I in you, and so that you may have life within you. All these blessings you now have were through My Blood which was shed on the cross.

Some details about our rituals, the church interior, and the order of the mass through questions and answers.

Is there any order for the place of the wine and the Bread (which become the Body and Blood of our Lord)?

The blood is always on the right side of the bread. Our Lord’s blood gashed to us from His pierced right side. So when I, as a believer am standing towards the east, the chalice will be on the right.

Also in the Holy Mass, it is very important for the deacon to know that the one carrying the little bottle of the wine, should be on the right hand side of the priest.

Does it matter which dome has the icons, the one in the middle of the church or the one above the altar.

Yes, the dome in the middle is the one that can have icons. The dome on the top of the altar should give the impression or impact of heaven when you look to it, as we say in the prayer of the “Agpia” of the third hour “Whenever we stand in Your Holy sanctuary, we are considered as those standing in heaven”. The holy sanctuary is heaven. This is because it contains the Holy Throne of God, where God Himself is present during the sacrament of the Eucharist with His holy angels filling the altar. Many fathers have seen angels and saints in the altar, and some of them have seen the Holy Spirit coming down on the bread and wine at the moment of conversion to the Body and Blood of the Lord. Also, if you notice at the end of the mass, Abouna says loudly “O angel of this sacrifice, lifting up our praise to the Lord, ask Him to forgive us our sins” and he sprinkles the water. We call this in our rituals letting or giving permission to the angel of the sacrifice to go back to heaven. Hence, the dome above the altar should only give the impression of heaven and should not have icons on it.

The Iconostasis (the icon holder at the front of the church) divides the church into the church in heaven and the church on earth. From the Iconostasis towards the west, it is the church on earth; and from the iconostasis to the east, it is the church in heaven. The iconostasis itself, carrying the icons of the Lord and the victorious saints, presents what we call “the victorious church”. Hence, when we, the struggling church on earth, look up to the saints who finished their struggle and see how luminous they are in heaven, we are encouraged in our struggle.

Furthermore, the correct order of the church does not allow any icons in the altar except the icon of our Lord Jesus Christ sitting on His throne, on the eastern wall of the altar. This icon is called the “Pantocrator”, which means “the almighty God, in whose hands are all things, and who is controlling everything”. Some churches will have in the altar on the ground a lot of icons for St Mary, Pope Kyrillos, Archangel Michael, etc...this is incorrect.

On the other hand, the dome in the middle of the church can have different types of paintings that ritually suit the middle dome of the church.

The church is a real model of the Tabernacle, which the Lord ordered Moses to build in a certain detail.

God asked Moses to do a dome in the Holy of Holies to be symbol of heaven, and in it was the ark of covalent signifying the presence of God and the two Cherubim covering it. And if you remember the last thing from the Lord to the holy apostles, on the Mount of Olives, when He ascended to heaven: He was with them on the mountain and suddenly after talking to them, they saw Him ascending up to heaven. Before disappearing He said to them I am going to prepare a place for you that I come to take you, that where I am you will be. After this, the Lord was taken up, and a cloud received them from their site. They kept looking up for sometime, so their eyes were up to heaven where the Lord went and will come back to take them. Then two angels came to them and said “Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven” (Acts 1: 11)

Questions about icons on the ‘Iconostasis’

The icon of the Last Supper

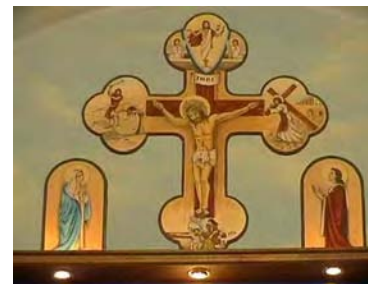
This icon is always in the top part of the Iconostas. There is a very important note here. The icons of the last supper in which you see the 12 apostles, and a lot of plates and food are



incorrect as this does not depict the last supper but the Jewish Passover. Our Lord completed the Law on our behalf (e.g. was circumcised, sacrifices were offered for Him at 40 days etc...), so He had the Jewish Passover, but afterwards, He removed everything from the table and put the bread and wine. In the Jewish Passover the Lord said one of the disciples will betray Him. Everyone asked "is it I?" and Peter pointed to John the beloved to ask the Lord and He said "It is He whom I shall give a piece of bread when I have dipped it" (Jn 13: 26). This was still the Jews Passover. The Lord dipped and gave Judas and the Bible says that at that moment a devil entered him or the devil possessed him. By the end of the Jews Passover, the Lord said the Judas "what you are going to do, do quickly". So Judas left. The "Dedascalina" of the holy apostles describes the event. As the Lord was starting to give St Peter His Body and Blood, Judas started to leave. Hence, in the true icon should be the eleven apostles and Judas leaving, and you notice that Judas looks smaller in size, and a bit dark carrying his bag of silver. So this is the true icon of the last supper, how it should be in the church. Some put the 11 without Judas at all, we don't mind this. But to have the 12 that is wrong, to have the 12 with many plates is wrong as well.

The Crucifix

Always on top of the last supper will be the crucifix. And if there is a space higher, we should put the resurrection. Here because of the space, we cleverly drew on the cross everything : the main stages of the crucifix, the whipping and carrying of the cross; in the bottom is the Lord being brought from the cross for burial; and at the top is the Lord rising from dead and two angels who were at the tomb (when the apostles after the resurrection), who said "He is not here He has risen". In the middle is always the cross with St Mary on the right (because in psalm 45 it says "The queen sat at the right hand O king"), and St John the beloved on the left (he was the only disciple who went to the crucifixion, and the Lord said to him "This is your mother, this is your son.")



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Question about the skull which is sometimes put under the cross

It is possible to have the skull under the cross, as one of the Holy Father in the church said that the place in Golgotha where the Lord was crucified is the place where Adam skull was lying (this is not definite) to signify the Blood of the Lord wiping the sin of Adam. This should be taken as a contemplation, not as a fact, because if we say the Blood of the Lord will be specified or contained in a little area to wipe away the sin of Adam, it means you are limiting the eternal infinite Blood of the Lord. And it might be also taken as a heresy that unless we attend or we are under the Cross we are not saved, but the Blood of the Lord was shed on the cross for salvation for all mankind, from Adam and Eve to the last person before the second coming of the Lord. One drop of the Blood of our Lord is enough to save the whole world. So it might be a sort of meditation, contemplation, spiritual thinking, but should not be taken literally.

Why do we put the snake under the cross?

The snake (or serpent) is what the devil used to deceive Adam and Eve and we say that on the cross the Lord crushed the devil, and since the sin. The promise of salvation was given by God, since the time she sinned and was given the punishment. God said that the Son of the woman (He said of the woman only, as our Lord was conceived from the Holy Spirit, without a man) crush the head of the serpent. The Lord on the cross crushed the devil. The snake drawn under the cross is a symbol of this.

There are some icons of the cross which contain all the details of the crucifixion and betrayal e.g. the rooster, nails, the silver, the dice (to signify the lots cast on the Lord's clothes). These should be used at home and not in church or on the iconostasis.

Icons of the 12 apostles

These are placed in the top part of the iconostasis, 6 icons on each side of the icon of the last supper. The order of three of them is fixed.

St John the Beloved is always next to the Lord on His left. He was leaning on the bosom of the Lord in the last supper. He leaned from the left side of the Lord where His heart is.



St Peter is next to the Lord, from the right. He was always with the Lord in some private events and he was always the first to respond/answer/act. Also from the events of the last supper when the Lord spoke about His betrayal, he couldn't ask the Lord, but motioned St John the beloved to ask the Lord. He was sitting on the right side of the Lord opposite St John the beloved.



to

St Matthias is always put on the right side to symbolise the fact that he was chosen by the guidance of the Holy Spirit to replace Judas Iscariot after the ascension of the Lord. Likewise, when we do the sign of the cross, we move our hand from forehead to abdomen then from left to right. This signifies that through the salvation on the cross and the work of the Holy Spirit in us we were moved from the left, which is the weak and sinful side, to the right, which is the side of power and righteousness. This is why anything done by the Holy Spirit is put on the right.

The icons of the rest of the disciples can be put in any order, or in the order of their names in the Holy Bible.

What about St Paul and St Mark?

In some churches they put St mark in the bottom right side. Some churches put St Mark the apostle in the top on one side, and St Paul on the other side. This will confuse the people as it will make a total of 7 + 7 equal 14. So we prefer to leave the top for the 12, because their number was pointed to in the old testament: e.g. 12 tribes, 12 wells of water when they were travelling in the wilderness (and 70 palm trees representing the 70 apostles). So we have to keep the number. But for sure St Paul is a great apostle and he did a lot and even said "I have laboured more than all of them" which is true.

Some questions about processions

All the processions of the church, either the procession during in incense raising (e.g. for a saint), or procession during mass for any occasion (e.g. resurrection), go from **left to right**. The only exceptions are:

1. One procession the priest makes during raising of incense. This goes from right to left as in the book of acts it was said that the church was growing and increasing in numbers, kept and supported by the right hand of the Lord.
2. A procession done only once a year, during the first hour of the Holy Great Thursday (during passion week). This is not a procession of worship but is a procession to condemn or reject the evil deed that Judas Iscariot did when he betrayed his master our Lord Jesus Christ.

Questions about the features of the icon of St Mary on the Iconostasis

Location: always on the right side of the main or royal door of the



altar,

She is carrying the Lord, and she is clearly on His right side, which should not be drawn in a vague, inexact way.

The icon of St Mary or any other icon, have their specific features of what they should contain which are derived from theological and Biblical understandings. is detailed in the study of iconology, which we will not get into in course. But the main feature is that St Mary is on the right side of Lord as the Bible says “at Your right hand stands the queen” (Psalm



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45).

Questions about the icon of St John the Baptist on the Iconostasis

This icon is on the left of the main altar door. The main features which it should have are:

The Lord is fully immersed in the water. This should be very clear not drawn in a vague way.



and

The fish drawn around the Lord point to the fact that the Lord chose disciples who were fishermen and said to them “follow Me and I make you fishers of men”.



His
will

There should be exactly 4 fish, not more or less. Four fish to signify the gospel will be preached to the 4 corners of the earth before the Lord’s second coming. The Lord came to us from heaven to our world. As we said previously, the world is symbolised by the sea. He came to fish us from the sea of the world.

that

Some people put a snake under the Lord’s feet, we don’t mind, but we prefer to put the snake under the cross, not in the baptism. The snake can be put in the icon of baptism as baptism is a symbol of (burial) and death with the Lord. And inside the baptism, the Lord crushed the devil for each one of us, and removes from us the punishment of death. Also in baptism, we are in newness of life, as St Paul explained clearly to the Romans in Chapter 6 from verse 2 to verse 10.

There is no specific number of angels that needs to be drawn in this icon.

The dove symbolising the Holy Spirit should be drawn with a bit of light coming down from heaven, to symbolise the moment when God the Father said “This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased, listen to Him”. The feast of Epiphany which means “divine appearance” is the only occasion in the life of the Lord on earth where the whole Holy Trinity became manifest at one time.

Questions about the icons of archangels Michael and Gabriel

Always next to St Mary, will be the Angels in order. Many people put Archangel Gabriel as he announced to her the birth of our Lord. But in the origin it should be archangel Michael then Gabriel, because archangel Michael is the chief of the heavenly and the one who announced the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, which is considered a greater event than the annunciation of His birth. And in the book of Daniel in the Old Testament when Archangel Gabriel was sent to Daniel to explain the prophesy but was prevented by the devil (referred to as the prince of Persia) until Michael came and helped him (Then he [archangel Gabriel] said “Do not fear, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart to understand, and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard; and I have come because of your words. But the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me twenty-one days; and behold, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me”. (Daniel 10: 12-14)

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In the church here because of limited space, we put the icon of archangel Michael next to St Mary and archangel Gabriel on the other side, in order to be able to put the icons of the church patron saints (St Bakhomios and St Shenouda) one on each side in a symmetrical way (but if space is available it should be the icon of St Mary, then archangel Michael followed by archangel Gabriel, on the same side).

Another icon that is always put on the iconostasis is that of St Mark the apostle which is usually put on the left side after the archangels. (Again if we have a space, the proper order would be archangel Michael, archangel Gabriel, St Mark the apostle and then the patron saints. No other saint icons should be put on the iconostasis).

Question about altars which have wooden doors.

The wooden doors have been put on the altars only in the early church because of persecution at the time, as there were frequent attacks on the monasteries and churches by the Barbarians, pagans or Muslims. Hence, when it was felt an attack was coming, the door was quickly shut to allow the priest to quickly eat the Body and the Blood of the Lord to protect them from the non-believers. Hence, the door was not for the priests or deacons to protect themselves, they were always ready for martyrdom, but in order that the holy sacrament, the Body and the Blood of the Lord may be protected. Nowadays, since attacks on churches are relatively rare, there is no longer a need for the wooden doors to the altar, and only a curtain should be there. The curtain has a meaning – in the Old Testament instead of the iconostasis and curtain, was a very strong wall from top to bottom, with only a tiny door in the middle of the wall. No-one entered through it except the high-priest only once a year in the day of “redemption” or atonement (see Leviticus 16). He could only enter with the blood of a sacrifice for the whole congregation. He had a rope tied to his waist because if anything happened to him inside, no one was allowed (and no-one dared) to enter, and he had to be pulled out by the rope. All this was to show that there was enmity between God and the people (sin is enmity to God), there was a wall between heaven and earth.

However, when our Lord was on the cross, this veil and separation between heaven and earth was destroyed. This is why we have the curtain, so that when we open it we show that the people now have access to the heavenlies, to the holy of holies; as St Paul explained in (Ephesians 2: 16-18) “And He came and preached peace to you who were far off and to those who were near, for through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father”.

The altar door at El-Sourian Monastery

There is a very high wooden door for the altar of the church of St Yeh-ness (John) Kama in El-Sourian monastery. Is called the door of the prophecies. And this door has 6 stages, telling about the stages since the church started till before the coming of the Lord in a prophetic way. But this is not the usual door in any altar.

The design drawn on the curtain

The Cross can be drawn. However a more preferred design is one where the following is drawn. The holy “Corbana” (holy bread used for the mass): on it is a big cross in the middle, in the very true old Coptic design, symbolising our Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Around the Lord are 12 crosses symbolising the 12 disciples who carried the cross, following the example of their teacher our Lord Jesus Christ (as He said “he who wants to be my disciple, let him carry His cross and follow Me”). Also there are circles symbolising the nails and the piercing of His side. 3 holes on the right = the crown of thorns + the piercing of His right side + right hand nail. And on the left will be the left hand nail and the nail for the feet (one nail in two feet together).

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Written in a circle around the 'corbana', in Coptic, is " Agios O Theos, Agios Yes-sheros, Agios Athanatos", which means Holy God, Holy Almighty, Holy Immortal who never dies. (This design is also that of the stamp which is stamped in the middle of the 'Corban' we use in the mass.)

Then there are grapes and wheat drawn to show our offering which the Lord humbly accepts from our hands and sanctifies into His Holy Body and Blood.

Hence, to summarise, the curtain tells about our Lord Jesus Christ Son of God, who came to save us to be crucified for our sake to give us His Body and Blood. Hence, the believer walking into the church sees this curtain which tell him/her about what is behind it in the sanctuary.

This design was made on a one to one scale and was sent to St Demiana Nunnery who made it. After they made it (in 1996), metropolitan Bishoy was very impressed by it that he took it to the Pope who likewise liked it very much and placed it at the front of the exhibition for the 100 year anniversary for the theological college.

The curtain should be only one, not split into two. It should be opened from left to right to show that through the sanctuary of the Lord we were moved from the left to the right side.

The Altar

The altar should be made of very costly marble, no matter the expense, as it carries the Body and Blood of our Lord. On it, is engraved the cross, the 'corbana' and the wheat, and the chalice and the grapes.

The entire altar symbolises the throne or the tomb of our Lord. It can either be a cubic or rectangular like a tomb.

Even though the altar looks very beautiful, it should not be left uncovered, but should be covered at all times with a red cover, as it symbolises the cross on which our God sacrificed Himself and shed His Blood for my salvation. Also, it should be covered in red because it is replacing the copper altar of the Old Testament, on which animal sacrifices were offered on behalf of the people for their sins. The church is always about humility, the beauty of the queen is from the inside (Psalm 45).

There is a second cover on top of the altar coming down to about 40cm from all sides. This is red all year except on the feast of resurrection and the holy 50 days, when it is white(as these are the most joyous days celebrating the fulfilment of our salvation in the resurrection).

On the altar as you all know we have the ark in which the chalice is placed, and while the ark is not in use, it always should be covered with small square veil. The ark is consecrated with the holy Myron oil and should not be touched without a veil by anyone except the priest.

The ark itself should have fixed icons, and then optional icons. The fixed icons are 1. the icon of the Lord Jesus Christ with the chalice and bread (and preferably 2 or more of his disciples as a symbol for the rest of the disciples who attended the last supper). 2. the icon of St Mary on the right. The chalice can have 4 or 6 faces. On the other faces should be the icons of archangel Michael, St Mark and the patron saints, as these are the main characters for this church.

The ark is a symbol of the ark of covenant in which was placed the vessel of Mana and the ten commandments.

Covering the altar when not in service

The altar should always be covered if not being used. This is taken from the Tabernacle in the Old Testament "Then you shall bring the ark of the testimony in there (Holy of Holies), behind the veil. The veil shall be a divider for you between the holy place and the Most Holy. You shall put the

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mercy seat upon the ark of the Testimony in the Most Holy. And you set a cover on the ark of the Testimony in the Most Holy” (Exodus 26: 33-34). The altar should only be exposed during the service, and also during the service you notice that either Abouna (the priest) or the deacons are standing around the altar, you can hardly see any thing. And even when Abouna is giving the Holy Body, a deacon stands in front of the chalice carrying the Blood with a candle.

The meaning of the two candles on the altar

The two candles on the altar are a symbol to the 2 angels who appeared in the tomb of the Lord after his resurrection. Hence, they should only be two.

The Holy Plate

If the altar is not consecrated, we can put a holy plate on it (which is consecrated with the Myron oil) to be able to pray the mass on it. After the mass, it is removed. However, if an altar is consecrated it does not need a holy plate.

We do not concentrate a wooden altar, because it may be broken. As it is consecrated, it should be permanent. The very first consecrated altar we know about, described in Genesis 28 when Jacob was fleeing Esau his brother, and spent the night at (what was later called) Bethel. He saw in a dream a ladder from earth to heaven and the Lord standing above it, and he when he awoke he said “How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven” (Gen 28: 17). “He took a stone that he had put at his head, set it up as a pillar, and **poured oil on top** of it”. This is why we consecrate the altar by pouring oil and it should be from a stone or marble, or something that does not erode, decay or breaking.



was

saw

Explanation for the icon of our Lord, ‘The Pantokrator’, covering the eastern wall of the sanctuary (The fathers called this eastern wall in the sanctuary “the bosom of the Father”)

This icon incarnates what St John the Beloved has seen in heaven in the revelation. It is rare of its kind, as it has almost everything St John talked about in his revelation.

You see the Lord on His throne, under Him the earth and the different planets, because it says in the psalms “The earth is your foot stool.” And He is always dressed in red, because it was said about Him that he was like the one all in red from the blood He shed for us.

Around His throne is the rainbow as St John saw it in the revelation and also because since He destroyed the world in Noah’s time, He promised not to destroy it again and made the rainbow as a sign to remind Him not to destroy the world again.

Around the Lord are the sun and the moon, and they don’t look shiny at all, because the Lord is the sun of righteousness in front of whom they look dim. The Lord will be our Light in the heavenly Jerusalem, there will be no need for the sun or the moon, or any other light.

The Alpha and Omega are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, symbolising that the Lord is the beginning and end, he has no beginning and no end.

The 4 incorporeal creatures, each one has 6 wings and is full of eyes.

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The 24 priests, if you count they are 12 and 12 around the throne, carrying in their hands censers (but not like the censers we use with chains, the original word describes censers which are held in the hand)

The 7 Archangels, Michael in the middle and Gabriel always with the olive branch in his hand, then the next will be Raphael, Sural, Sadakeal, Sarathael and Ananeal.

In the bottom there are 7 oil lamps which symbolise the seven 7 spirits of God which he saw and the 7 sacraments of the church.

The icon is surrounded with clouds that are gradually getting lighter, giving the impression of heaven.

There is always a light (an oil lamp) in front of the Lord which should be lit 24 hours a day. This is for the following reasons:

1. Because He is the light of the world
2. It is in the east, symbolising the star that appeared in the east to lead the wise-men to the Lord.
3. It symbolises the grace of the Holy Spirit, the oil that is enlightening our lives

Hence, when one looks at this icon, one feels as though in heaven with John the evangelist, with the entire heaven in front of him. These are the features of the icon which is placed on the eastern wall of the church (the “bosom of the Father”, and it should be the only icon in the altar. The only other alternative is the icon of the Lord Jesus Christ sitting on His throne.

Why is the Cross drawn around the Lord in the icon of the Pantokrator?

In psalm 96 (the first psalm prayed in the ninth hour) there is a verse (which is unfortunately omitted in the English translation but is there in the original languages and in the Arabic translation) that says “say among the nations the Lord has reigned on a piece of wood” symbolising the Lord saving us and defeating Satan and sin on the wood of the cross. The Lord was also seen by St John the beloved in his revelation as a slaughtered lamb.

What is the meaning of the ostrich egg placed at the door of the altar?

It is put there for 2 main reasons:

1. From tradition, it is said that when Pontius Pilate reported the resurrection of the Lord to Caesar, he couldn't understand it. So Mary Magdalene took an egg and went to Caesar and said “how does the new bird come out of its egg? If it has life it breaks out of the egg. Can you imagine that the little bird God created can have life to come out of the egg, and the Lord Himself God can't come out of the tomb”. And he understood it.
2. But the ostrich egg was chosen because the ostrich covers its egg with sand and unceasingly looks at it with great concentration in order to protect it. This is to remind the believers to concentrate on the east, on the altar, and not to look around.
3. Also that God has his eye on us the whole year.

Why do we have candles in front of the icons of saints?

As the candle is consumed to give light to us, so have the saints given their lives up for our Lord Jesus Christ and became an example and a light to us.

Some spiritual meanings hidden in the design of the Coptic Cross

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Each limb of the cross has 3 ends. This is to symbolise the Holy Trinity in one. Also, with the four limbs of the cross, we will have 12 ends to symbolise the 12 disciples. Around the cross is written “Eesos Pikhristos, Eyos Theos” = Jesus Christ Son of God. The 4 limbs of the cross show that the Lord’s salvation has spread to the 4 corners of the earth (also the rays of light coming out of the cross symbolise the spread of the light of the gospel to the whole world).



Explanation for the large metal cross which is on a stand, with a little flag, inside the altar

We should have this cross always ready, to be used in processions. The flag is red all the year, except in the holy 50 days of the resurrection, when it is white, and during passion week when it is black (same with the altar cover which is red the whole year except during the holy 50’s when it is white and passion week when it is purple).

This cross is always at the front of any procession done in the church (e.g. resurrection, for saints, funerals etc...). The church is highlighting that the cross is our lives as St Paul said in 1 Corinthians 1:18 “For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God”. I am saying this because in all Protestant churches and lately in some Catholic churches the cross has disappeared from the church life, which is unfortunately very sad.

Explanation of the symbols related to the eagle

The eagle is symbol to St John and his gospel. St John was the most theological of the apostles, and he wrote his gospel after seeing the revelation in the island of Patmos, because he found some people were confused about the divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ. He talked about the divinity of the Lord, about high theological matters that are above understanding. This is why the eagle was chosen to symbolise his gospel, because the eagle flies up higher than any other bird. Also St John was taken high up to heaven while still in the body but in a spiritual way, and saw heavenly matters that cannot be uttered.

Also as the eagle has very sharp eye-sight being able to see from very high distances, so did St John the beloved have a very sharp spiritual eye. He was able to feel the presence of the Lord when He stood on the shore at the Sea of Tiberias while they were trying to catch some fish, and He said to St Peter “It is the Lord”. St John was the first of all the disciples to feel the presence of the Lord in this case.

Another meaning behind the eagle is that it symbolises how God cares for us, because the eagle is one of the birds that greatly cares for its children. It protects its children under its wings, and when they start growing up, it carries them on its wings high up and leaves them in the air that they can practise flying. It follows them with its eyes very closely, so that as soon as it feels they are not coping, it carries them again with its wings. Likewise the Lord does with us when He nourishes us spiritually in a gradual way. He also said to the people of Israel when He brought them out of Egypt: “*The Lord your God who goes before you, He will fight for you, according to all He did for you in Egypt before your eyes, and in the wilderness where you saw how the Lord your God carried you, as a man carries his son, in all the way you went until you came to this place*” (Deuteronomy 1: 33)

Baptism

The correct design for the baptism room: The baptism room should be always in the northern western side of the whole church and it has 2 doors, one door opening to outside and another door opening to the inside of the church. Hence, the new believer enters through the outside door to the

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baptism room, is baptised, and then enters the church through the other door. The lost sheep, enter through the baptism room and become of the sheep of Christ. In the prayers over the person to be baptised we pray saying “make him/her a sheep in Your flock for Your eternal kingdom”. As the Lord said in John 3, “unless the person is born again, he cannot enter the kingdom of God”. Nicodemus asked him “how can a person re-enter his mother’s womb and be born again?”, but Christ meant the womb of the church, the mother of the believers.

We use special towels for baptism, which are kept in the church. This is because these towels are filled with the holy water and the holy Myron oil. A deacon washes them by hand in a certain basin and the water is poured either in running water in the sea or under a tree where no body sets his foot on it. The water of the baptismal font should not be drained in the usual sewage. Traditionally, it should be underground (so in this church the baptismal font drains into a large barrel underground with holes in it, that the water may be absorbed gradually. In the prayer prayed on this holy water we say at the end “let this water go back to the bottom of the earth”

The water that is consecrated in one day, can be used in baptising any number of people in the same day, or on for a few days (not more than 3-5 days), if there is a necessity or need for this.

After consecrating the water, the first person to be baptised should be a male. If this is not the case and there is a female to be baptised first after consecrating the water, the priest should drop a cross (plastic, or any material not affected by water) in the water after consecrating it before baptising a female.

Also baptism should be in a closed room and not in an open area. This is because the baptism basin itself, is considered to be an altar consecrated with prayers and the Holy Oil (Myron), and even the prayer of consecrating the water, is almost very much similar to the holy mass in its structure, but in different wording to match the baptism. So it is befitting to have the baptism basin in a closed room to protect it, as you protect the altar inside the sanctuary with special orders.

The baptism basin is usually built in a round shape, as through the baptism the person receives the new nature, that entitles him to be united with our Lord Jesus Christ, our eternal God; and always the circle symbolises the eternity of God, as a circle has no beginning and no end.

RITUAL THEOLOGY I

SECTION SIX

Sunday – The Day of The Lord

The day of the Lord is the day of Resurrection, Sunday replaced Saturday as the day of the Lord. Since the beginning of the Church, when it was in the hands of the Apostles, we have celebrated the Sunday. In Acts 20:7, St. Paul said they broke the bread on the first day (which is a Sunday). The Lord also arose early on Sunday morning, and He appeared 5 times on that Sunday. He also appeared on the following Sunday when He showed Himself to Thomas. The Lord appeared 10 times altogether, 7 of those appearances were on a Sunday 5 on the first Sunday, once on the next Sunday and once on a different Sunday to the 500).

In the book of Didache (the teachings of the Holy Apostles), they said “you believers ought to get together on the day of the Lord and break the bread offering, the Eucharist”. There is a letter from St. Barnabas (not in the Bible) that says we ought (as we learnt from the Lord) to keep the 8th day and celebrate the Eucharist on that day. Many of the Apostolic Fathers (like St. Eustinus – Justin the martyr), St Clement of Alexandria, Origen the scholar, the apostolic constitution, (that the main celebration for the church life is Sunday but they did not forbid celebrating the Eucharist on Saturday if needed) inform us of the early Church’s practice of gathering on Sundays. The start of the Church was on a Sunday (the day of Pentecost). St. Severus wrote that “as we received from all the generations of the Holy Fathers, to celebrate the Eucharist on the first day of the week”.

The reason why the church replaced Saturday with Sunday in the New Testament

We know from the Old Testament that the Lord created the whole universe (heavens and earth) in six days and God rested on the seventh day, blessed and sanctified the seventh day, which is ‘the Sabbath’ (Genesis 2: 1-3).

Of-course God did not feel tired and needed rest after the creation; as God is always working according to what the Lord said “My Father is always working and I also am always working” (John 5: 17). God created Adam and Eve, and all their means of comfort and rest. Indeed, their most important form of ‘rest’ was from sin; they felt no desire. They lived in peace with the animals as the king and queen, and they lived in full peace with God. In fact, Adam and Eve have been enjoying being present with God daily. This was “the rest” of the Lord, He rested when He saw Adam living in the paradise, in full comfort and enjoying the love of God and His daily presence with Adam, and also covered by the grace of God which made Him free from the passions of sin, added to Adam’s full authority on all creation that made him living in peace with all the animals. When Adam sinned, the rest of the Lord was broken, because Adam whom He had created was destined for Hades. God was waiting for his rest to be renewed by salvation from sin for humanity, by overcoming the effect of the sin, but this would only happen by the death and resurrection of the Lord. That is why God performed miracles on the Saturday, to explain that the rest on Saturday came through the mercy of God, by saving Adam and His descendants from the effect of sin. That’s why He used to heal people on Saturday and always before healing the person He tells him/her “your sins are forgiven”. He told them “the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath” (Mark 2:27). He performed many miracles on Saturday (Matthew 12 and Luke 6 – the man with the withered hand), Mark 2 & 3 and Luke 13 (the woman with the bent back), Luke 14 (healing another man), he healed the man at the Bethesda pool in John 5, He opened the eyes of a blind man in John 9 on Saturday, and He cast out a demon from a man on a Saturday (Mark 1).

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The true rest is a spiritual rest. Originally, Saturday was a full day of worship, and also physical rest from work (described in Leviticus and Numbers). So the Lord not only meant physical rest on that day, but also to make us consecrated and worshipping the Lord on that day. As explained above, the Lord's real rest was seeing Adam living in the paradise in full peace, both physically and spiritually. When, however, Adam sinned, this rest was broken, and there was a strict rule instructing people not to work, not to be busy with the world and to at least try to do something spiritual on that day, in preparation for the day of full rest which comes with the salvation by the Resurrection of Christ our Lord. That's why Sunday became the real day of rest, because through His Body and Blood given to us by His Resurrection, we'll be admitted to heaven, which is the true eternal rest without disturbance.

If you consider the mass of the believers, you'll remember "for every time you eat of this bread, and drink of this cup you preach my death, confess my resurrection and remember me till I come." This means that this Body and Blood which are given to you through His death and resurrection will lead you to abide in Him until he comes to take you to be with Him eternally. Immediately after the response of the congregation, the priest prays to call the Holy Spirit to come upon the bread and wine to convert them to the Body and Blood of our Lord. That's why the Sunday of the resurrection, on which the Lord perfected His victory over the devil, the sin and death, and granted us His Body and Blood to grant us unity with Him until we are glorified with Him, becomes the main day of service and worship.

The Holy Church, led by the Holy Spirit recognises that the day of the Lord became the main day of worship, but the Church also did not cancel what was revealed before, that is the importance of Saturday, as Christ said "I did not come to destroy the law, but to complete it." So the church reminds the believers to keep Saturday as a joyful day by not fasting in it and not allowing prostrations in it and in the Holy Great Fasting it treats the rituals of Saturday like those of Sunday, whereas the other days are treated differently. The Church relates this to the understanding that Sunday is the beginning of the creation of the heavenly powers, and Saturday is the day after the completion of the creation. By means of our Lord's Resurrection, Sunday is a commemoration of His returning us to our original rank, and an acknowledgement that through Him we now know the way back to heaven that we might regain that which we lost through sin. Also, by celebrating the Holy Mass on Sundays, we feel we are in heaven joining in with Heavenly creation in praise, the same Heavenly powers which were created on the first day of Creation, that is, Sunday.

Also with the count of days, Saturday being the seventh, Sunday will be the eighth day and always number 8 is symbol to life after death, meaning eternal life, which was only opened to us through the resurrection of our Lord, after He was crucified and died on our behalf.

Biblical and Historical proofs for making Sunday the day of the Lord

1. Genesis 1 said that "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth, and God said let there be light, and it was". This was the first day. The fathers agreed that this was the day the angels were created, and the beginning of all of the further creation. Therefore Sunday was the creation of the Heavenly powers and Hosts. In the mass, we are as if in heaven, and we are sharing the praises with the heavenly powers. In the 3rd hour prayer, we pray: "whenever we stand in your Holy temple, we are considered as those who abide in heaven". The relationship is that the creation of the Heavenly powers was on a Sunday, in the mass we are partly experiencing heaven on earth as, through the Mass we take His Body and Blood and unite to Him until we reach Him in Heaven. So it is befitting to consider the mass of Sunday as the main mass in the whole week being the day of the Lord.
2. St. Severus stated that the Lord was born on a Sunday, and the Lord, the Sun of righteousness who shone upon those who were sitting in darkness and the shadow of death,

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so by His birth on Sunday, He shone upon us for salvation from the darkness of sin, as the sun shines and scatters darkness away.

3. He was circumcised on the 8th day, which is the next Sunday. And circumcision in the Old Testament, meant that this person is of the people of God and it was symbol to baptism in the New Testament which grants the person the new birth in our Lord Jesus Christ.
4. He entered Jerusalem on a Sunday as a King (He reigns over our hearts as we experience Him in holy communion).
5. He arose on the Sunday and He confirmed His resurrection by letting Thomas touch His body on the following Sunday.
6. He sent the Holy Spirit on a Sunday, and the Church started that day with 3000 being baptised. (1000 is always the number of Heaven, and the 3 is the Holy Trinity) so the Church takes us to Heaven under the faith of the Holy Trinity.
7. St. Severus added that the general resurrection of the second coming will be on Sunday.
8. Acts 20:7, 1 Corinthians 16:2, Chapter 14 of the Didache, and Chapters 10, 31 and 38 of the Didascalia all mention that Sunday is a Holy day. The Apostolic Constitution has a section by Clement that mentions this also, and chapter 36 says Bishops should be ordained on a Sunday as it is the day of the Lord. Canon 21 in the council of Elvira (convened in 306A.D.) and another council in Illiberis, Spain also mentions Sunday as a Holy Day. Constantine issued a royal decree in 321 A.D. that Sunday should be a Holy day and that no one should work but attend worship in the Church. King Theodosius the Small, reaffirmed it in 425 A.D., and again the two kings in their own countries, Leon and Antinimius, reaffirmed it in their royal decrees of 469 A.D. Many other fathers also spoke about Sunday as a Holy day (St. Athanasius, St. Theophorus and St. Augustine).

Spiritual understanding of Sunday being the day of the Lord?

It is not intended to be a physical rest, as much as giving ourselves time to feel the day of our Lord, and we have to be with the Lord on that day by attending the Holy Mass, and sharing as much as possible in the Body and Blood of Christ, and using the rest of the day in as spiritual way as possible.

The church never recommends that her members work for money on Sunday. Some of the Holy Fathers even taught that neglecting sanctifying the day of the Lord leads to perishing: “cursed is he who does not sanctify the day of the Lord”. The Church tries as hard as possible to get them to do spiritual work on Sunday. The holy fathers advised that after the holy mass we should keep the rest of the day for spiritual work, for reading the Holy Bible and spiritual books. The great blessing is to read the Bible to somebody who needs it and to nourish them spiritually. St Macarius the Great after the service would rush the brothers in the monastery to flee. They would say “we are already in the wilderness, where should we flee to?” and he would say “quickly go to your own cells for the worship of the Lord”. St Arsenius used to do the same thing, and so did many other fathers.

Sunday and fasting

Since the church started after the feast of the Pentecost, she has forbidden her children from fasting on Sundays (by abstaining from food after the holy mass) because it is a joyful day of the Lord. (The mass starts with “Hallelulia, this is the day of the Lord”). St. Athanasius the Apostolic 296AD said we learned from our Holy Fathers the Apostles that we should not fast by abstaining from food on Sunday. Also, in the council of Gangra (325-382 AD) it was said that anyone who fasts on Sunday would be excommunicated. This was confirmed in the local council of Sargossa (380AD).

That's why, when the day of the preparation before the 2 great Lordly feasts, the birth of Christ and Epiphany falls on a Monday, we don't fast by abstaining from food on the Sunday, as the usual for the day of preparation before the great Lordly feast (el-Baramon). Neither do we fast on Saturday as well, as the Lord's Day in the Old Testament. Hence replace them both with the Friday, and in this case, the preparation becomes 3 days. With the same understanding, if the feast comes on Sunday, the preparation will be 2 days. Many fathers also spoke about not fasting on Sunday, like St. Dioscoros, Tertullian, St. Athanasius, Pope Theophilus the 23rd Patriarch of Alexandria, St. Augustine etc.

Sunday and kneeling down in prayer

We kneel down on Saturday and Sunday for reverence before the Holy altar, not for repentance. So we don't do the metanias (means prostrations) of fasting, as on normal days, at the start of the "Agpia" prayer, just as we do not do them for the 50 days of celebration following the Resurrection. Many fathers wrote about this, such as Pope Peter the seal of martyrs; St. Basil the great in 230 AD; the first council of Nicea 325 AD, Canon 19, and the canon of Ibn El-Sebaa, one of the church scholars who collected the canons of the church in His book "The precious pearl in the sciences of the Church".

The commemoration of the deceased on Sundays

There is nothing wrong with mentioning the names of the departed on the Sunday, but we never use the sad tune for the commemoration of the saints.

The relationship between the Sundays of the year and the Holy Resurrection

Here we divide the Sundays of the year into 3 groups.

1. The 8 Sundays of the 50 joyful days between the Resurrection and the Pentecost. On those 8 Sundays, we mention the Resurrection, we celebrate a procession for the Resurrection (even the Sunday between Ascension and Pentecost). As we also do during the weekdays. We never fast or do 'metanias', we say 'je aftonf' (you have Risen), and we do pray the same hymns in all those 50 days.
2. The Sundays from Pentecost to fourth Sunday of 'Hatour', we continue treating the Sunday responses like the Sunday of the 50 days after the resurrection. For the first Sunday of the Coptic month 'Koiak', as it falls during the fasting preceding the Birth of Christ (the Advent), we stop saying "je ak-tonk" (You have risen) in the responses and start saying "je ak-I", meaning 'You have come', and this continues until the feast of the resurrection and repeats as explained.
3. The 6 Sundays of the Holy Great Fasting. The hymns are changed, we don't use "alleluia vai pe" (this is the day the Lord has made) because we are fasting with the Lord in order to receive that day. So we pray "alleluja je ef mevi" (means "Alleluia, the thought of man". And we pray 'ti shori' instead of 'tai shori'. "The golden censor" replaces "the censor of pure gold"). We also pray the other hymns that are relevant to the great fasting.

The readings of various occasions that come on Sundays

1. If a Lordly feast comes on a Sunday, we read its readings instead of the original readings of that Sunday.
2. The two feasts of the cross are treated like the Lordly feasts. If it falls on a Sunday, the reading of the feast of the cross replaces the reading originally set for that Sunday.

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3. If in a Coptic month come 5 Sundays, always the 5th Sunday has a special reading. But if the memorial feast of annunciation (the 29th of the Coptic month) falls on the 5th Sunday of the month, here the reading of the feast of the annunciation will replace the reading of the 5th Sunday.

References:

1. The Holy Bible
2. The Canons and writings of the holy apostles (Didachia, Dedascalia)
3. The writings of the early apostolic fathers (first century and first half of second century). Found in the volumes of 'Ante-Nicene Fathers'
4. The decisions and resolutions of the three ecumenical councils recognised by our church (Nicea 325 A.D., Constantinople 381, Ephesus 431). Found in the volumes of 'Post-Nicene Fathers'
5. An old manuscript named 'The order of the church of God'
6. 'The precious pearls in explaining the rituals of the church' (an old Arabic reference in more than 1000 pages)
7. 'The precious pearl in the sciences of the church' (another old Arabic reference)
8. 'Manaret el-Akdaas' (in explaining the rituals of the church and the Holy Mass).
9. 'The church, the house of God'. Father Tadros Yakoub Malaty.
10. 'Mesbah el-zolma' in explaining the rituals.
11. 'The valuable treasure' in the church orders.
'The desire of souls in the order of rituals'